

THE ROLE OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION  
IN THE REVITALIZATION  
OF ESTABLISHED CHURCHES

A THESIS-PROJECT  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF  
GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY  
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MAY 2015





To my wife, Joanna, who has walked this journey with me, bringing both our daughters, Rachel Beth and Mary Kate, into the world during the course of study.

To Grace Temple Baptist Church of Dallas, TX, who encouraged me in this journey, who walked through the process with me of seeking God, and who is now seeing a revitalization because of it.

To my fellow pastors of transitional churches who are walking through the frustrating process each day of hoping and praying that the church you lead can once again be a vital part of your community. This volume was written for you.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In a journey such as this one, there are so many people to thank. To my wife, Joanna, thank you for encouraging me on this road, for never giving up, and for taking care of our home and our children while I worked to see this come to completion. To David Currie, my mentor in this process, who without your patient, steady, and encouraging spirit, I probably would have never finished the journey. To Grace Temple Baptist Church of Dallas, who not only was the subject of the research, but who also provided the finances and time to allow me to complete this journey. To my parents, Randy and Ragen Jespersen, who walked the journey of my dyslexia all the way from kindergarten; without you, I would not have made it to high school, much less to a doctoral degree. To the D.Min. office at Gordon-Conwell Seminary, and to my editor, Peter Cooper, who walked patiently through this journey with me. To my family at the Baptist General Convention of Texas; thank you for allowing me to continue with you in this journey. To my cohort and to my professor and reader, Dr. Stephen Macchia; thank you for your encouragement along the way.

## ABSTRACT

Pastors all over America are struggling to lead their declining or plateauing churches to prosperity again. This project tested the hypothesis that spiritual formation is foundational to seeing a church turn around. Its setting was Grace Temple Baptist Church of Dallas which had experienced a steady forty-year decline. The project consisted of 35 daily devotionals, 6 sermons, and 6 Bible studies designed to introduce the members of Grace Temple to spiritual formation practices. The results demonstrated that spiritual formation is a foundational key in the turn around process.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **The Problem and Its Setting**

It is more difficult to thrive as a church in the United States than it was 50 years ago. Thom Rainer states that as many as 100,000 churches in America could be dying; these are churches that could have 10 years or less left to live.<sup>1</sup> Although he does not have exact figures, as the head of the publishing arm of the Southern Baptists, Dr. Rainer certainly has his hand on the pulse of the issue. American churches are dying, irrespective of denominational ties or location. Times have changed, and the modern pastor and the church are struggling.

Eugene Peterson's *Working the Angles* states, "American Pastors are abandoning their posts, left and right, and at an alarming rate. They are not leaving the churches and getting other jobs. Congregations still pay their salaries. Their names remain on the church stationary and they continue to appear in pulpits on Sundays. But they are abandoning their posts, their *calling*."<sup>2</sup> Using this as the starting point, Peterson goes on to say, "The Pastor's Responsibility is to keep the community attentive to God. It is this responsibility that is being abandoned in spades."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thom Rainer, "Autopsy of a Deceased Church, 11 Things I Learned," *Thom S. Rainer* (blog), April 24, 2013, accessed July 11, 2014, <http://thomrainer.com/2013/04/24/autopsy-of-a-deceased-church-11-things-i-learned/>.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Peterson, *Working the Angles*, 2.

According to the Barna research group, a real problem exists among so-called born again believers grasping their own personal faith:

Overall, the current research revealed that only 9% of all American adults have a biblical worldview. Among the sixty subgroups of respondents that the survey explored was one defined by those who said they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is important in their life today and that they are certain that they will go to Heaven after they die only because they confessed their sins and accepted Christ as their savior. Labeled "born again Christians," the study discovered that they were twice as likely as the average adult to possess a biblical worldview. However, that meant that even among born again Christians, less than one out of every five (19%) had such an outlook on life.<sup>4</sup>

The research demonstrated that even among those who use such a specific term as "born again" an uncertainty exists as to whether they will spend eternity in heaven. If one who attends church weekly cannot ascertain where they will spend eternity, then this might suggest that the church has missed the mark when it comes to forming people spiritually.

Barna also released disheartening statistics about the divorce rate amongst believers and non-believers: "When evangelicals and non-evangelical born again Christians are combined into an aggregate class of born again adults, their divorce figure is statistically identical to that of non-born again adults: 32% versus 33%, respectively."<sup>5</sup> The article rightly points out that Christians are more likely to get married, while non-Christians are more likely to cohabitate. Yet, the essentially equal divorce rates indicate

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<sup>4</sup> The Barna Group Ltd, "Barna Survey Examines Changes In Worlview Among Christians In The Past 13 Years," *Barna Group*, March 6, 2009, accessed June 3, 2011, [www.barnagroup.com/transformation/articles/252-barna-survey-examines-changes-in-christian-worldview-among-christians-in-past-13-years/](http://www.barnagroup.com/transformation/articles/252-barna-survey-examines-changes-in-christian-worldview-among-christians-in-past-13-years/).

<sup>5</sup> Barna Research Group Ltd, "New Marriage And Divorce Statistics Released," *Barna Research Group*, March 31, 2008, accessed June 3, 2011, [www.barna.org/barna-update/article/15-kids/42-new-marriage-and-divorce-statistics-released/](http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/15-kids/42-new-marriage-and-divorce-statistics-released/).

that, although the mandate for Christians to be in loving family relationships is clear throughout Scripture, Christian marriages are missing something.<sup>6</sup> It is a common practice for pastors to require couples who plan to marry in a church to undergo pre-marital counseling. They discuss the meaning of marriage, and quite often, offer biblical insights for success in marriage. Knowing that Christian marriages have a divorce rate that is near equal that of the non-Christian divorce rate, a conclusion may be that there must be something more than pre-marital counseling needed to see these marriages go the distance.

Referring to the “Buster” generation - those generally under the age of 40 - Barna research from 2006 shows additional problematic areas: “Young believers were actually more likely than non-believers to try to get back at someone and to have stolen something. Moreover, in only eight of the 16 behaviors,<sup>7</sup> the profile of born again Busters was virtually identical to that of non-born again Busters.”<sup>8</sup> Christians seem to be no better off when it comes to certain moral issues than non-Christians. In fact, according to this research, Christians are worse off than the world in the area of

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<sup>6</sup> Genesis 2:22-24, Mathew 19:4-6, Ephesians 5:22-23.

<sup>7</sup> Behaviors surveyed viewed sexually explicit movies or videos, sexual encounter outside of marriage, viewed sexually graphic content online, cohabitation, sexual fantasies, engaging in sex outside of marriage, viewing pornography, sexual relationships between people of the same sex, used illegal drugs, getting drunk, Smoking, profanity in public, to get back at someone who hurt or offended them, to take something that didn't belong to them physically fight, abuse someone.

<sup>8</sup> The Barna Research Group Ltd, "A New Generation Of Adults Bends Moral And Sexual Rules To Their Liking," *Barna Research Group*, October 31, 2006, accessed June 3, 2011, [www.barnaresearchgroup.org/barnaupdate/article/13-culture/144-a-new-generation-of-young-adults-bends-moral-and-sexual-rules-to-their-liking/](http://www.barnaresearchgroup.org/barnaupdate/article/13-culture/144-a-new-generation-of-young-adults-bends-moral-and-sexual-rules-to-their-liking/).



forgiveness. If born-again Christians who are going to church act this way, there is an obligation to figure out what the church is not teaching.

An alarming reality is that if the church loses its morality, the nation loses the only moral compass it has left. It has been said that the legendary Gandhi once stated, "I like your Christ but I do not like your Christians, your Christians are so unlike your Christ."<sup>9</sup> Those words, generally attributed to one of the great leaders of the world, can truly sum up what is happening in the Christian faith. Christians are not acting like Christ, and genuine spiritual formation is not taking place. Where there is a lack of spiritual formation, the health of the church suffers.

Churches and their leadership often recognize when they are decline. Often, church leadership will implement strategies for church growth. Unfortunately, while these strategies are well-conceived, well-intentioned, and often necessary, they seldom work. So, if these church growth strategies cannot succeed in bringing about a turn around what might the answer be? How can stagnant and declining churches bring new life into their congregations? Perhaps, the answer might be intentional spiritual formation aimed at developing people to grow in the image of Christ, which will naturally lead to growth both spiritually and numerically.

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<sup>9</sup> Quote DB, accessed May 30, 2014, <http://www.quotedb.com/1905>. This quote is generally attributed to Gandhi; no official source available.

## Spiritual Formation and Church Revitalization

The inability or unwillingness of the church to equip its members in the area of spiritual formation causes many issues for churches, including declining health. Ed Stetzer's *Comeback Churches* makes this important statement about evangelism in regard to a church that has begun the turn around process: "Comeback churches see evangelism as a journey not a destination."<sup>10</sup> This means that when people visit or join a church that the journey for them is not complete.

Unfortunately, many churches in the Southern Baptist Convention, and possibly in other denominations as well, see evangelism as their only goal. They believe evangelism is complete when a person has gone through the waters of baptism. However, it is quality discipleship and spiritual formation that lead people who have come to Christ to grow closer to him. According to Stetzer, 53 percent of "comeback churches" raised membership requirements, and 93.2 percent took the step of adding a class for new members. These are churches that have at least done something to begin to close the "back door." What might occur if churches add to this an intentional spiritual formation plan that moves beyond the new members class?

It is true that children must crawl before they walk, and walk before they run. Thus, if people who come to a church are never taught the basics of Bible study, prayer, and reflection, they may never learn to walk with the Lord on their own. Furthermore, if that practice is never learned, their sense of morality will most likely equal that of the world's.

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<sup>10</sup> Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 2007), 118.

George Barna makes an important statement about churches that attempt to grow after they have experienced decline:

It is tempting to regard the declining church as a condition that simply requires a healthy dose of superb technical assistance to correct. Although this assessment is true it is incomplete. Unlike major for profit corporations that recently have experienced hard times, the church has a spiritual dimension that cannot be overlooked. Turn around techniques are useful, but any leader who strives to regenerate a church without placing a primary emphasis upon the spiritual renewal of the body is destined to fail.<sup>11</sup>

Very few, if any, pastors begin with the idea that they will not lead their churches in spiritual formation. Yet, the demands of ministry slowly and surely pull them away from their primary calling to be caretakers of souls.

With this in mind, this thesis proposes that an intentional spiritual formation plan is key to the revitalization of a stagnant or declining church. When church members actively engage in spiritual formation, that church is more likely to experience health that can lead to church growth. Churches that are intentional about spiritual formation will emphasize it in every aspect of the church from evangelism and discipleship to the fellowship opportunities its members enjoy. This can lead to a life given to the worship of God, a strong personal witness, simplicity in what a person feels they need to be successful, and a support of the church financially, spiritually and physically.

For the purpose of this thesis-project, spiritual formation may be defined as the increased formation of Christian identity and character that flow out of a growing

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<sup>11</sup> George Barna, *Turn Around Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1993), 97.

intimacy with Christ as individuals engage in spiritual disciplines such as Bible-reading, fasting, reflection and prayer. If one person after another within a congregation embarks on the spiritual formation journey as defined, that congregation has the potential to become a community of believers who love Jesus more than they love their own lives. When that occurs, the church is on the road to spiritual formation that culminates according to Philippians 1:6, "That he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

Now, while it may be difficult to quantify, or measure, effective spiritual formation should be evident in the fruit of people's lives. Are they more in love with the savior? If they are, the fruits of the spirit described in Galatians 5 will be more evident in a person's life: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."<sup>12</sup> Absolute perfection may not be in order, but certainly a person should be sharing his or her faith, working to better his community, and living a godly life in front of that community. This should mark the members of a church engaged in intentional spiritual formation. The hearts and lives of people change for the better on a daily basis as genuine spiritual formation occurs in their hearts.

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<sup>12</sup> Galatians 5:22-23.

## **Spiritual Disciplines for Spiritual Formation**

As state above, for the purpose of this thesis-project, spiritual formation may be defined as the increased formation of Christian identity and character that flow out of a growing intimacy with Christ as individuals engage in spiritual disciplines such as Bible-reading, fasting, reflection and prayer. Spiritual disciplines are not an end in and of themselves. The goal of practicing spiritual disciplines is an increased intimacy with Christ. While many disciplines exist, this thesis-project focused on a select few as a starting point for a congregation.

### **Fasting for Spiritual Formation**

While fasting from food is a common part of a fasting experience, a discussion about fasting ought to be much broader than that of just food. Rather, it should focus on the outcomes of fasting. Fasting provides a better perspective on the world. When a person fasts for a day, a week, or even forty days, the process can help them become more sensitive to what God will eventually want in them. In helping people to see fasting as more than just a time to give up food, they can begin to see what they might be holding on to and their resistance to letting go of those things. Fasting can help people examine the excesses that may hurt their relationships with God.

As an example, in speaking of Catherine Marshall's short piece on fasting, Foster says, "In this selection on fasting from criticalness, notice how vivid she makes the relationship with God. It seems clear that she and the Lord have a lively dialogue going,

one that often involves some resistance on her part, a resistance that reminds us of the relationship Abraham and Moses had with the almighty.”<sup>13</sup>

Marshall did not need to give up completely being critical, at times. In fact, when thinking about Marshall, this author would certainly receive any criticism she might offer and he would examine himself deeply to see if it was real. However, she needed to take her criticism and bring it back under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Comparing our modern culture, a person does not have to give up media completely, although it will be suggested many do for a period of time. However, the addiction to media that so many in our churches seem to have does need to be surrendered.

Corporate fasts provide an opportunity for people to bring those areas that they may have allowed to become addictions under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. They can prayerfully choose one significant area to fast for a predetermined period of time. If done correctly, this practice can loosen the perceived dependence on this item, and it can remove it from being a central part of their lives.

### Spiritual Reading for Spiritual Formation

Bible study is not enough. In this author’s faith tradition, the preceding statement would raise some eyebrows because Baptists believe the Bible and the study of it to be one of the most important foundations in the life and ministry of a church. Some may even say it is the most important. Yet, it seems that simply studying the Bible does not bring about the true change that is needed in the lives of people.

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Foster and Emilie Griffin, *Spiritual Classics* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2000), 57.

Milfred Minetrea says, “Religious systems have long specialized in the transfer of spiritual knowledge, but they have an equally long heritage of producing enlightened followers whose lifestyles remain unchanged by that spiritual knowledge.”<sup>14</sup> Yet, spiritual formation, by its very title, implies that more than just a transfer of knowledge occurs from one person to another. Spiritual formation takes on the longer task of seeing a person change his or her lifestyle.

The study of Scripture is an important part of spiritual formation, but an emphasis ought to be placed on how to apply the truth a biblical passage to one’s daily life. Practically speaking, this may include teaching a congregation both the important discipline of how to read through the Scripture in one year and how to use small portions of Scripture in their daily lives through study.

The ancient practice of *lectio divina*, or “spiritual reading” is one way that may be used to teach a congregation how to read the Bible for spiritual formation. Richard Foster says, “When we come to the Bible expectantly, attentively and humbly, we will experience the joy of losing ourselves in the great river of Life that is life, indeed. That is what the Bible is all about: human life eternally bound up in divine life.”<sup>15</sup> The Bible is not just a book to be read, or even a book to just be enjoyed. Rather, the Bible is a book that is to be lived out. Teaching a person to practice spiritual reading may help that to occur more than any other practice a person might do.

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<sup>14</sup> Milfred Minetrea, *Shaped By God's Heart: The Passion and Practice of Missional Churches* (San Francisco, CA: Josey Bass, 2004), 54.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Foster, *Life With God* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2008), 35.

The practice of spiritual reading can take many forms. One example is a simple process that includes journaling the responses to two questions and a prayer. The first question is, "What does this passage teach me about God?" If put in the form of a prayer, "God, what does this passage teach me about you?" The second question is, "What does this passage teaches me about myself?"

The final step in this example of spiritual reading is for practitioners to ask God what changes they need to make in their lives. The response to this prayer would be written in their journals, and become part of their daily prayer life, asking God to show how it impacts their lives and to help them work through these changes.

Meditation on the Scripture is an additional practice that can benefit believers, and it flows out of spiritual reading. Scripture meditation focuses on a short part of a passage that a person can meditate on for a day, a week, a month, or even years, if necessary. Meditation may include memorizing a passage, praying through that passage, making that passage a part of one's daily life.

Foster quotes Peterson, saying,

As Eugene Peterson comments "to put it bluntly, not everyone who gets interested in the Bible and even gets excited about the Bible wants to get involved with God." Reading the Bible to encounter the living God requires us to open our hearts as well as our mind-to come to it with what Karl Barth calls "an honest, a fierce, seeking, asking and knocking."<sup>16</sup>

It is meditation on Scripture that gets one to this point. The study of Scripture is important, and it should be taught. In fact, the church should devote time to teach

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<sup>16</sup> Foster, *Life With God*, 186.



people how to study the Bible for themselves. One text states in its preface, "As evangelical Christians we hold that the Bible is important. But in spite of such claims, biblical illiteracy seems to be commonplace within our circles."<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, this is true, but it's possible that people may become more interested in the study of Scripture if they can see how spiritual reading and scriptural meditation can change their lives.

### Prayer

A third spiritual formation discipline is prayer. This discipline ought to follow the discipline of spiritual reading. It is the author's belief that a person who knows how to do spiritual reading will know how to better pray. God speaks to his children through the Bible. If a person knows how to interact with the Scripture, he will be more prepared for prayer.

Different types of prayer such as centering prayer, breath prayers, and intercessory prayer can be invaluable for spiritual formation. It is also beneficial to study the priorities of prayer modeled in biblical prayers such as the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6. In addition, the use of a prayer journal offers a way of being able to look back to see what God has done in one's life through answered prayer. An intentional focus upon prayer as important to spiritual formation moves beyond the bumper sticker theology of prayer that claims prayer is important while it has so little a place in believers' lives.

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<sup>17</sup> Gary Burge, "The Greatest Story Never Read," *Christianity Today* (August 9, 1999), 43, cited in J. Scott Duval and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 13.

Prayer, coupled with spiritual reading, is the most important of the disciplines. Foster says, "When the apostles were tempted to invest their energies in other important and necessary tasks they determined to give themselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word."<sup>18</sup> Martin Luther declares, "I have so much business I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer."<sup>19</sup>

### Solitude and Silence

Solitude and silence is another discipline important for spiritual formation. Thomas A. Kempis wrote, "In quiet and silence the faithful soul makes progress, the hidden meanings of the Scriptures become clear, and the eyes weep with devotion every night. Even as one learns to grow still, he draws closer to the Creator and further from the hurly burly of the world."<sup>20</sup>

Though spiritual formation can and should be a group experience, solitude is a necessary spiritual discipline. From the author's observation, Westerners generally have an aversion to silence because they live in a world that is constantly moving. They feel that if they are not with people, a sense of loneliness very well may set in. People feel they have to have noise at all times, even to the point of buying sound machines so they can fall asleep at night. Yet, from what Kempis says above, people need to know that it

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<sup>18</sup> Acts 6:4.

<sup>19</sup> Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1998), 34.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 150.

is extremely important to take the time to be still<sup>21</sup> to not only study, but to meditate on the scripture.<sup>22</sup> From the author's observation, the silent time before the Lord can actually be the most valuable time of the day.

### Reflection

Reflection is the last of the disciplines to be discussed because the other disciplines are foundational to reflection. People can only reflect upon what they have learned. Reflection is the examination of where people are with God and to consider where it is that God may be leading them. People are often confused about what God wants in their lives, and this discipline can help people begin to understand what God is doing and what he has planned for them.

Like the other disciplines, the discipline of reflection also benefits from the practice of journaling. When people can journal through a reflective decision, that record of a decision can be very helpful to them later. Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worthy living."<sup>23</sup> Therefore, learning to reflect on what God is doing in one's life is a necessity to live a life that is worth it.

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<sup>21</sup> Psalm 40:10.

<sup>22</sup> Psalm 119:15.

<sup>23</sup> Plato, *The Apology*, 34, Kindle.

## **Grace Temple Baptist Church**

Exciting events and knowledge transfer, with no spiritual formation as a foundation, have done very little to help the church in America to engage and change a culture. The church must do more in terms of spiritual formation, and the goal of this project is to begin that work at Grace Temple. While the final analysis of this project incorporates findings related to spiritual formation in other churches, the primary case study is focused upon Grace Temple Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas.

### **The Decline of GTBC**

Grace Temple Baptist church of Dallas, Texas was typical of many churches: the community was changing. According to the 2010 Census, the zip code had a 72.7 percent Hispanic population, but from the author's observation, the church only had about a ten percent Hispanic population. Beginning in 1965, the church experienced a slow decline that was sometimes accelerated by poor leadership or simply by the nature of the situations in which the church found itself. In fact, from 2000 to 2008, the average worship attendance dropped from 225 to 90 on Sunday mornings; a far cry from the average attendance of nearly 800 in 1965. The average Sunday School attendance had a similar drop from 150 to 80.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Annual church profile data cited here and throughout this thesis was obtained from the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Clay Price, statistician. ACP report from 1973-2013 in Appendix J, Grace Temple Annual Church Profile 1986-2013.

When this author became the pastor in 2006, the Sunday morning attendance averaged 110, and it continued to decline. There were a number of factors involved in the attendance issue that included a lack of leadership and a lack of vision prepared to meet the needs of a changing community.

During these declining years, Grace remained constant in two areas. First, although Grace was unable to break through the barriers that separated it from the community, the church was doing ministry in the community. The church ran yearly camps and a Vacation Bible School. In 2007, a summer coordinator and interns were hired to conduct four sports camps for children as part of additional summer programming implemented to stem the tide of a continuing decline.

Second, Grace had a strong Christian education programs that included a Sunday School, a youth ministry, and an AWANA program<sup>25</sup> that encouraged children in the memorization of scripture that met on Wednesday nights.

From 2007 to 2008, Grace experienced its greatest decline. It was during this time that Grace implemented programming to encourage new growth. In addition, from 2006 to 2008, Grace spent tens of thousands of dollars to remodel the outdated facilities. These changes were needed and they had an eventual impact on the fate of the church; however, none of it seemed to stem the tide at that time of the continuing decline.

To put as simply as possible, attempts to revitalize the church by hiring staff, remodeling, and adding programs did not stop the decline that Grace Temple was

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<sup>25</sup> AWANA is the acronym for Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed.

experiencing since 1965. Grace Temple was joining the many churches that have tried to turn around by a variety of factors, but who learned along the way that spiritual formation must be foundational to that turn around.

### The Breaking Point

In the fall of 2008, Grace Temple added two leadership staff members and continued its church programs, but the decline was still fairly severe. One afternoon, while driving home, I while serving as senior pastor of Grace received the second of two calls that day in which people stated they had decided to leave. That evening, I sat in the living room and thought if this decline continued I would need to get out for the sake of my career and two month old marriage.

### The First Spiritual Formation Experience

The Lord made it very clear to me that afternoon that I was not supposed to leave at that point. Rather, I was supposed to lead the church through a period of fasting and prayer. The holidays were approaching, and as a part of the fasting and prayer, people were asked to fast from food for one day. For 40 days people fasted from something in their lives so that they could spend more time in prayer and in the word. People spent time praying for the church, reflecting on Scripture, and praying for their own spiritual growth. For most, this was the first time they had done something like this in and for their church. One man gave up his daily watching of *Judge Judy* (the television show), another person gave up fast food for the time period, and others gave

up social media and various other activities that they believed took their attention away from the study of God's word and from prayer.

### Ongoing Spiritual Formation at Grace Temple 2006-2013

It is important to look at the ongoing spiritual formation that was happening at Grace Temple from 2006 to 2013. During this time, the church genuinely sought the Lord. This occurred under this author's leadership from the first week of April 2006 until the last week of June 2013, and it has continued on today.

The church was encouraged each week to pray through a prayer guide called the Corporate Prayer Guide. This was a new way to focus the church on prayer beyond only praying for the sick in the church. This particular guide focused each week on praying for people to be saved, for people to follow the Lord in baptism, for people to join the church, and for resources to be available. These were key to seeing a church turn around.

In addition to praying for the sick and the hurting, prayer for those who were outside of the walls of the church and outside of the Christian relationship had to become a priority. We knew God wanted relationships with people, and asking for those relationships was important. The main prayer request during these years was "God, do that which only you can do." It is the prayer of a spiritually-formed person because a spiritually-formed person knows that only God can do amazing things in his church.

In 2009, another part of the spiritual formation emphasis was to encourage people to read through the Bible in a year. For some, this was the first time they had ever done this. This practice of reading through the Bible in a year has continued through the years.

Another avenue used to focus on Scripture was to encourage people to memorize Scripture. This included the addition of a monthly memory verse in the worship guide and the creation of a devotional involving that memory verse. Potential leaders were put in a class where, amongst other things, they learned the ancient practice of *lectio divina*.

During these years, Grace had two more 40-day emphases that called the church to fast and pray.<sup>26</sup> A sermon series on the spiritual disciplines and *lectio divina* became a teaching series used in various settings. A great resource on *lectio divina*, and perhaps the best book this author studied on Bible reading, is *Eat this Book* by Eugene Peterson.<sup>27</sup>

The church became intentional about teaching people about spiritual formation and what it means for their lives. During these years, the D.Min. program in which the pastor was enrolled encouraged not only his own spiritual formation, but that of the church, too.

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<sup>26</sup> February-March 2010 emphasis on praying for Grace Temple; September-October 2012 refers to the emphasis for the D.Min. project .

<sup>27</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).



The spiritual formation emphasis resulted not only in an increase in attendance, but in other tangible areas, too. The church no longer had a sense of dying. Rather, because a focus was placed on relying on God, people felt as if the church was doing something.<sup>28</sup> The church felt more alive than it had in many years; there was renewed spirit in the hearts of the people. People shifted their efforts from what was best for them to what was best to reach the community that surrounded Grace. Prayer, fasting, and an emphasis on the Bible brought about a trajectory change at Grace Temple. It grabbed the momentum back from a dying church to a living and thriving congregation.

During this time of spiritual formation, the church became more open to the community around it. Grace Temple had always had a genuine open door policy to visitors. Yet, even in a community that was primarily Hispanic, the church never had a key leadership staff member who was Hispanic. This changed during the years that Grace went through several different spiritual formation experiences.

A new ministry to Spanish-speaking people began more than three years ago. The pastor assigned to lead this group wisely began the process of discipleship and spiritual formation with his leadership team. It took a long time to see this ministry grow, partly because of the transient nature of the Spanish-speaking people in our area and partly because this ministry was doing the hard, time-consuming work of discipleship and spiritual formation.

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<sup>28</sup> See Appendix H, Interview: Middle-Aged English-Speaking Hispanic Woman.

This Hispanic congregation was doing well with an average attendance of about 80 after only 2 years, and lives were being dramatically changed. The planting of a Hispanic-speaking congregation has been a much slower process than simply letting excitement build a church. Yet, it is a better process because a church that is built by excitement must then maintain that excitement to stay afloat.

Less than a month after my departure, the church called the Hispanic Associate Pastor to be the Senior Pastor.<sup>29</sup> Although it was not a total and fundamental attitude shift, it certainly pointed to the fact that the church had gradually made a shift in the way they felt about a person of a different ethnicity serving in a leadership position. To look deeper at the way spiritual formation can bring about more racial harmony in a church, see the book *A Many Colored Kingdom*.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to the cultural shift, Grace has experienced a shift in broadening its efforts to reach the young adult population. A few months ago, a staff member of Grace Temple was assigned the responsibility of ministering to young adults. Although the group is small, he has begun well by starting the long process of building a strong ministry, focusing on discipleship and spiritual formation. As this focus takes hold in each of Grace Temple's ministries, the vision and hope is that ten years from now Grace Temple will be not only a large church, but also a spiritually strong church because of the foundation that is being built among its members.

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<sup>29</sup> Church Business Conference July 28, 2013- Also, see church web site <http://gracetempledallas.org/#/about-us/staff-leadership>.

<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, S. Steve Kang, and Gary A. Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004).

Grace Temple is a church that has experienced many changes during the last seventy years, including great growth, steady decline, and new growth that came largely after a time of spiritual renewal.

### **A Case Study: Spiritual Formation at Grace Temple**

Spiritual formation is not easy to quantify. However, for the purpose of this thesis-project efforts were taken to establish measurable goals. These goals were measured within an established 35-day experience focused on spiritual formation because Grace Temple has prior experience with two 40-day periods of fasting and prayer. The two events occurred in late 2008 and early 2010.

In 2008, the church was in a position of desperation; it looked as if the church might have to close. Many members had left, and although the financial position of the church was still good because of rental income, attendance and momentum were fading quickly. At that time, the church was called to a 40-day period of fasting and prayer during the middle of the holiday season. Understandably, the days each person took to fast were quite difficult.

This particular period of fasting and prayer was timed exactly right, and it came at a time that the church truly needed it. Though the holiday season was not a time the church would have chosen for a fast, it was the time that the Lord seemed to be leading for the leadership to implement it. The fast seemed to help the overall spirit of the church. Soon after, the church implemented two new ministries, baptized several

people, and the attendance more than doubled. The 2010 fast was a continuation of what God accomplished during the 2008 fast with additional observable results.

These two experiences shaped the expectations of what will occur during the congregational focus on spiritual formation. It should be noted that in 2008, spiritual formation was not a high priority on a corporate level. The corporate emphasis came out of a time of desperation.

The focus was to do something different than what was done in the prior two experiences. In the first two experiences, attention was focused on the church itself, on seeing the church be revitalized, on praying for the church and community. It was more of an outward focused experience, while focusing on some of the inner disciplines. This thesis-project focused more on what was to happen in the inner life of a person. Thus the expectations should be different. Still, as a result of the project Grace Temple noted an increase in baptisms, people, resources, and ministries.

Now, it should be noted that a 40-day period will not produce what takes years of working with the Lord. Eugene Peterson quotes an atheist philosopher who God seemingly used to state a great truth, saying,

Friedrich Nietzsche, who saw this area of spiritual truth at least with great clarity wrote, "The essential thing in 'in heaven and earth'... is that there should be long obedience in the same direction; there thereby results, and has always resulted in the long run, something which has made life worth living."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 17. This quote is from Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Helen Zimmern (London, UK: 1907), sec 188.

Even Nietzsche, a self-professed atheist, understood that spiritual formation is a long process that cannot possibly be completed in a 40-day period.

However, a person's perceived ability to do the work of spiritual formation work can be measured. So, the measurement tool used for this project measured if participants felt more equipped to feed themselves spiritually after participating in the 40-day experience. In addition, it asked if they were more likely to do the long-term work of spiritual formation. The expectation was that it would affirm that a person who participated in an intentional spiritual formation plan would be more likely to be communing with the Lord years down the road than if they did not go through the experience.

Immediately following the 40-day emphasis, a survey was conducted that focused on the various spiritual exercises used during the spiritual formation period. It measured a person's interest and ability to do the spiritual exercises, and it measured the likelihood that the individual will continue to practice those spiritual exercises.

This six-week period could be compared to a military "boot camp." A soldier is not finished training when boot camp is completed. Rather, the experience is foundational for what will be a career of training to protect the country. The 40-day experience is not the end, but rather a foundation for a life of continuous spiritual formation.

Now, it is also expected that God will bring growth to the life and ministry of the church because of the prior experience with the 40-day fasts. This should be a natural outflow of the spiritual formation plan. When God begins to move in the life of a

person, and then another person and another, in one local body, it is only natural that both spiritual and numerical growth occurs as a result. The disciples spent time praying and fasting between the Ascension and Pentecost.<sup>32</sup> Strategic planning was not the agenda. Rather, seeking God in a constant state of prayer was the agenda. Then, when Pentecost came, the church exploded with growth. God is ready to move and his people must be ready to be a part of that movement. Spiritual formation is a way to prepare God's people for what he will do.

Philippians 1:6 states that God is the one who begins the good work in you and that complete spiritual formation will not be complete until the day of Christ Jesus. The lessons and methods offered to Grace Temple is only the beginning.<sup>33</sup> The hope is that the members of Grace Temple will use this as a beginning point to practice these spiritual formation exercises throughout the course of their lives.

### **Conclusion**

It will be 2024 in ten years, whether we like it or not. Each one of us will be ten years older; the years will pass by. We cannot stop time; it will continue. The only decision that we get to make is what we will do with those years. The purpose of this project is to help believers who have a desire to draw closer to God to do so. Hopefully, as they do, they will see themselves grow in spiritual formation, and the church will

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<sup>32</sup> Acts 1:14.

<sup>33</sup> See Chapter 4 for the project design.

benefit, too. God invites us into a grand life with him, but we have to make the decision to accept that invitation.

The chapters that follow discuss spiritual formation from several angles. Chapter two will present a theology of spiritual formation that is centered in the Trinity and the church. Chapter three explores and interacts with others who have written on spiritual formation from theological and practical points of view. Chapter four presents the project as it was implemented at Grace Temple. Finally, chapter five proposes a way forward based upon the findings of the project.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

#### Introduction

As stated in chapter one, spiritual formation may be defined as the increased formation of Christian identity and character that flows out of a growing intimacy with Christ as individuals engage in spiritual disciplines such as Bible-reading, fasting, reflection and prayer. Setting a proper theological foundation of spiritual formation can help a church experience a healthy revitalization of its life and ministry as a congregation. If a church is to become more like Christ and become more intimate with him, then it must understand who Christ is by means of the revelation God has given through Scripture.

Dallas Willard aptly observes,

If we as Christ's people genuinely enter Christ's way of the heart, individuals will find a sure path toward becoming the persons they were meant to be: thoroughly good and godly persons, yet purged of arrogance, insensitivity, and self-sufficiency. Christian assemblies will become what they have been in many time periods of the past and what the world desperately calls for today; incomparable schools of life-life that is eternal in quality now, as well as unending in quantity.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting On the Character of Christ*, 10th ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012), 25.



A few centuries earlier, John Calvin wrote, “The gospel is not a doctrine of the tongue, but of life. It cannot be grasped by reason and memory only, but it is fully understood when it possesses the whole soul and penetrates to the inner recesses of the heart.”<sup>2</sup>

Believers’ lives, their very souls, must be committed to the gospel. And, the only way to have that level of commitment is to cultivate healthy spiritual disciplines that flow out a solid theology of the church, understanding what the church ought to be.

This chapter discusses a theology of spiritual formation that is applied to pastors, lay leaders, and laity. Although these three categories may suggest a spiritual class system, this is not the case. James 3:1 does state that teachers are held to a higher standard, but this may refer to both lay leadership and clergy. R.C.H. Lenski, speaking about this text, states, “The participle states the reason why many should not want to avail themselves of this privilege ‘since you know that we shall receive greater judgment.’ James says ‘we shall receive;’ he includes himself.”<sup>3</sup> So, while not wanting to create a false dichotomy between laity and clergy, a distinction exists, and so leaders need to lead the way in spiritual formation.

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<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *Golden Booklet of the True Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004) 20.

<sup>3</sup> R. C. H Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and of the Epistle of James* (Columbus, OH: Luthern Book Concern, 1938), 609.

## **A Theology of Spiritual Formation**

The Apostle Paul told the Philippians he knew the work God began in them would be carried out to the day of Christ Jesus.<sup>4</sup> Commenting on Philippians 1:6, Frank Thielman says,

God will complete the good work he has begun in the Philippians. The work which must be identified with the Philippians' salvation will reach its consummation only at the "the day of Christ Jesus." It is a work that God alone accomplishes, but the notion that it is not yet complete shows it involves a progressive transformation of the lives of the believers.<sup>5</sup>

Spiritual formation is the single most important pursuit of any church. So, the questions that need to be asked are, "What is the basis for spiritual formation?" and "What is a theology of spiritual formation?" These questions are vitally important because without them we have no clear basis by which to do formation which if done correctly will lead to revitalization in some way. A theology of spiritual formation begins by answering some basic doctrinal questions that are important for any believer to know and understand. First, who is God? Second, who is Christ if we are to be made in His image? Third, who is the Spirit that is to guide us into truth? Fourth, what is the nature of the Church that is supposed to help us become all that we are to be? These are important because they represent first and foremost who God is as three persons, one God. The church is important because it is the community established by Jesus to facilitate and do the work of spiritual formation.

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<sup>4</sup> Philippians 1:6.

<sup>5</sup> Frank Thielman, *Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 38.

## God

When people say the word “God,” many different things may come to mind. Some follow many gods, while others have confused ideas about who God is. Some believe in a “Santa Claus” god who gives them anything they want at the moment they ask. Others cringe in the presence of the mean “Ogre” god who is waiting to strike them dead at the moment they do something wrong. How one understands the person and nature of God has a direct impact on his spiritual formation. Healthy Christian spiritual formation requires a healthy biblical understanding of who God is and how he is active in the world.

Genesis 1:1 makes it clear that God, and no other, brought everything into existence. For one to have an appropriate spiritual perspective on who God is, it must be understood that God is not the product of man’s creation. Rather, God is the Creator, the beginning, and he is the one who gives life to all. St. Augustine understood this and he addressed God, saying, “Despite our lowliness, human beings aspire to praise You, though we be but a particle of Your creation. You awake in us a delight at praising You. You made us for Yourself, and our heart is restless until it finds its place of rest in You.”<sup>6</sup>

This makes for a different kind of spiritual formation from that which compartmentalizes life with God by kept in one corner, only being acknowledged when

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<sup>6</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine: Modern English Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2008), 15.

he is needed to serve one's self-interests. As creator, God is not interested in part of a person's life; he wants all of it. Furthermore, as Augustine asserted above, the human person will not be satisfied until he finds God. He is the only one who can bring lasting satisfaction.

John Calvin stated that "our mind cannot conceive of God, without rendering some worship to him, it will not however be sufficient simply to hold that he is the only being whom all ought to worship and adore, unless we are also persuaded that he is the fountain of all goodness, and that we must seek everything in him, and in none but him."<sup>7</sup> It must be understood, as Jeremiah says, that God is the potter for his people,<sup>8</sup> and they must completely allow his molding in their lives. This is the basis for any spiritual formation. If a person is to be formed by him, he must recognize God is the God of the heavens, and more specifically, Lord and Master of his life.

Proper spiritual formation cannot occur if a person does not know God. If one is not careful, he can be quite involved in the practices of spiritual formation and yet never really connect with God. Henri Nouwen provided insight from some spiritual forefathers when he said, "The desert fathers did not think of solitude as being alone, but as being alone with God. They did not think of silence as not speaking, but as listening to God. Solitude and silence are the context within which prayer is practiced."<sup>9</sup> The practices were not the end; they were the means of knowing and being in the presence of God.

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<sup>7</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 7.

<sup>8</sup> Jeremiah 18:5-10.

<sup>9</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*. Reprint ed. (New York, NY: Ballantine, 2003), 63.

For the purpose of this study, a brief discussion of two attributes of God will help to understand who he is: God is just, and God is love. These attributes were chosen because they best define God's relationship with his creation. God's love, the idea that God is for you and I, gives us a basis to do formation. For when one comes into the prayer closet, she can know that she is not there to appease God; rather, she is there with the one she knows unconditionally loves her. That God is just reminds one that there is a punishment for sin, and yet, God has appeased that punishment through the sending of his son. To understand God's love, one must understand God's justice for it is to the place of justice that God sends His son to rescue us.

### **God Is Just**

The justice of God flows out of his holiness, and the holiness of God forms a standard for his people in their spiritual formation. Peter, quoting Leviticus, writes, "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'"<sup>10</sup> If the ultimate goal of spiritual formation is to be more like God, one must be maturing towards holiness. To mature towards holiness, one must do everything possible to not be stained by the sin of the world.

H.A. Ironside comments that,

No longer are we to conduct ourselves, or fashion our behavior as we once did when, in the days of our blindness and ignorance when we were under the domination of carnal desires. Like the Israelite about whose garments was to run a fringe of blue, the reminder that he was linked up with God of heaven, and upon which he was to look and remember that he was called to exhibit the

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<sup>10</sup> 1 Peter 1:15-16.

heavenly character for God had said, "Be ye Holy; for I am Holy," so we too are to manifest holiness in all our words and ways as becomes a heavenly people passing through a world of sin.<sup>11</sup>

Prior to Peter's letter, Jesus taught, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."<sup>12</sup> Jesus pointed his followers to the perfection of God. Understanding the perfection of God makes it possible to understand the justice of God.

The perfection of God is evident in the perfection of his initial creation. God created man and woman and put them in the midst of the Eden. These two creatures were commanded to multiply and to rule over the earth. They were given free reign of a perfect garden with the exception of one tree from which they were forbidden to eat. In Eden, they were holy, without blemish, and perfect. Unfortunately, the man and woman ate from the forbidden tree and sin entered the world, ending the creation's perfect state of existence.

Because God is holy, he had to expel them from the Garden; he had to separate himself from them because his perfect nature could not remain around sin. As a result, death entered the world because sin entered the world. Because the holiness of God required judgment, death and suffering entered the world. If man had simply stayed in Eden and not eaten from the forbidden tree, God could have permitted man to stay in that perfect place and in the perfect state of existence. Yet, God could not allow this because of sin. Justice demanded that Adam and Eve be put out of the garden.

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<sup>11</sup> H. A. Ironside, *Hebrews, James, Peter* (Neptune: Loizeaux Brothers, 1986), 20.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 5:48.

Another aspect of God's justice involves his care for the poor, the downtrodden and the oppressed. A person who is being spiritually formed will be concerned about justice for the outcasts. However, this is not the aspect of justice that is the focus of this thesis. Rather, it is God's justice as it relates to all of humanity because all have sinned and are separated from God, and all will die in that sin apart from some miraculous divine intervention.<sup>13</sup>

In Romans 3:23, "falling short" in the original Greek text refers to the idea of literally missing the mark. This is what it means for God to be just. If God was fair, as many want Him to be, this is where it would stop. All would be destined for hell because it would be the only right and fair judgment. Yet, the joy of life comes from the reality that God is not only just, but he is also love.

### **God Is Love**

The Bible says that God is love, and goes on to say that if we do not love, then we do not know God.<sup>14</sup> In discussing the justice of God, it could be easy to forget the love of God. Yet, John 3:16 states God loved the world and that he demonstrated this love by giving his only Son "that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

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<sup>13</sup> Romans 3:23.

<sup>14</sup> 1 John 4:8.

This verse not only shows the incredible love of God, but also the justice of God. George R. Beasley-Murray states that this text summarizes John's gospel in that, "it originates in the love of God for a disobedient world, it centers in the giving of the only Son to and for the world, and its end is the that people may not be lost but live under the saving sovereignty of God...If, as many think they language echoes Abrahams giving his only son, whom he loved (Gen 22) the event in view is vaster."<sup>15</sup> God's love compelled him to save, yet the only way to save was to give Jesus as a sacrifice. Thus, God is loving, benevolent and caring, and still just in his actions.

While God's love is ultimately shown through the incarnation of Christ, his love is evident throughout the Old Testament, too. God's love is present in the story of Joseph when a young man who is sold into slavery rises to become the prime minister of Egypt, a position that the same brothers who sold him would one day need.<sup>16</sup> In the Exodus narrative, God's love for Israel is evident when he demonstrates he had not forgotten them, leading them out Egypt and delivering them from slavery.<sup>17</sup>

After God brings Israel to the Promised Land in the book of Joshua, Judges records God's love repeatedly demonstrated through his provision of judgment and deliverance to draw an unfaithful people back to himself. This pattern of God judgment and deliverance continues to the time of Christ when he provides the ultimate savior sent to save the world. When one knows that God is for him, he can enter the

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<sup>15</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 51.

<sup>16</sup> Genesis 37-50.

<sup>17</sup> Exodus 4-12.



disciplines of prayer and spiritual reading in peace, not trying to appease God, but participating in a growing relationship without the fear of being lost as 1 John 3:1 declares, “See what great **love** the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of **God**! And that **is** what we are! The reason the world does not know us **is** that it did not know him.”

### **Attributes To Live By**

These two attributes provide a great example for the believer’s personal spiritual formation. How can a believer not forgive, as the man did in Matthew 18:21-35, in light of all that she have been forgiven? How can a believer not treat the poor well, if God, while he was cast out, invited him in?

Learning who God the Father is provides a door to being spiritually formed by him. For the Christian, it is a relief to know that God is worthy of imitating. He is merciful, just and loving. On the other hand, many religions have ancient false gods who warred with each other and with humans. These gods chose to be either kind or cruel to humans. Belief in these gods can be riddled with fear and uncertainty, providing no secure foundation for healthy spiritual formation.

It is also important to understand that people are not gods, they are not becoming gods, nor do they have to fret over the great responsibilities of being God. As Scripture says, God is the ruler over all nations and everything that lives within them.<sup>18</sup> Because of his power, his love, and his justice, believers simply do not have to worry

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<sup>18</sup> 2 Chronicles 20:6.

about the world in which they live. Rather, they live for him, being formed into the image of his son, Jesus Christ. One day, he will take them home forever in the perfectly spiritually formed state that he granted them.

It is important for pastors to teach their congregations about the greatness of God. When they learn about the greatness of God, they can truly and genuinely pray for God to work. Peterson says, "Here are four intercessions, praying into the presence of and participation in God, the God who is previous to who we are and what we are doing, the God who is previous to what has gone wrong in our lives. Our problems don't define us; God defines us. Our problems are neither the first nor the last word of who we are; God is."<sup>19</sup> This can be a great comfort from the great God his people serve.

### Jesus

Understanding who Jesus is provides the key to understanding how to imitate God. The Bible is clear on its teaching about the incarnation of Jesus Christ. If the Bible were to be put in chronological order, John 1:1 would precede Genesis 1:1. Jesus Christ was in the beginning with God, and He was God, and now He is flesh incarnate in the world. Beasley-Murray says that "*Theos* without the article signifies less than *o Theos*; but it cannot be understood as a 'a god,' as though the *Logos* were a lesser god alongside the supreme God; nor as a simply 'divine.'"<sup>20</sup> Wayne Grudem states, "Jesus

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<sup>19</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing up in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 158-159.

<sup>20</sup> Beasley-Murray, *Romans*, 10.

Christ was fully God and fully man in one person, and will be so forever.”<sup>21</sup> The single most important thing to understand about Jesus Christ is that he is God and through him, we know God.

Healthy Christian spiritual formation has a relationship with Jesus Christ at its core. Jesus was incarnated, came to earth, died a criminal’s death to atone for sin, rose again on the third day, conquering death and ascending into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father, making intercession for his people. Revelation calls him the Alpha and the Omega,<sup>22</sup> and he is the One through whom we pray. He is the ultimate Word of God, and through him we see the Father. When the question was asked in John 14 about wanting to see the Father, the answer Jesus gave was that they had seen the Father because they had seen Jesus.<sup>23</sup>

Jesus Christ now has the role of sitting at the right hand of the Father and making intercession on behalf of his people.<sup>24</sup> Douglas J. Moo writes, “No one can successfully condemn us because Christ has died for us and has been raised to life to be our Intercessor before the Father. With such a defense attorney, it is no wonder that the prosecution loses its case.”<sup>25</sup> Spiritual formation is made possible because of Christ. That process is impossible without him.

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<sup>21</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1994), 529.

<sup>22</sup> Revelation 1:8.

<sup>23</sup> John 14:6-10.

<sup>24</sup> Romans 8:34.

<sup>25</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 283.

## Holy Spirit

God the Spirit is the next person of the Trinity we must understand in this world of spiritual formation. Scripture states that when a person is saved, he immediately receives the Holy Spirit.<sup>26</sup> It does not happen at a later time; thus, all believers have the Spirit of God working in them. It is the Spirit of God working in a person that brings about spiritual formation. In fact, a person who is spiritually formed will have the fruit of the Spirit.<sup>27</sup>

Yet, Scripture, such as 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22, also teaches that one can quench the spirit.<sup>28</sup> This quenching of the spirit seemingly happens when one neglects a life of prayer, and a life of thankfulness.<sup>29</sup> It is also possible for a person to grieve the Holy Spirit.<sup>30</sup> Again, this is in the context of a life of sin, such as anger, theft, brawling, bitterness, and slander. These are areas that either quench or grieve the spirit within the believer. The encouragement of the biblical text does not focus on the avoidance these things, but instead, it encourages the believer to be filled with the spirit.<sup>31</sup>

What is interesting in the Thessalonian text is that this filling of the spirit does not come specifically from spiritual disciplines, but rather, it comes out of a more

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<sup>26</sup> Ephesians 1:13.

<sup>27</sup> Galatians 5:22-23.

<sup>28</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22.

<sup>29</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:16-19.

<sup>30</sup> Ephesians 4: 19.

<sup>31</sup> Ephesians 5:18.

corporate place. However, the disciplines bring us to the place of carrying out the command issued by Paul in Ephesians 5:19, “speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord.”

This text demonstrates that spiritual formation is both corporate and personal.

Believers are to speak to one another in a certain way, with the Psalms and words that come from the spirit, and to make music from the heart. Spiritual disciplines, such as spiritual reading and prayer, are two disciplines that allow a person to worship God from the heart.

So, the person who chooses spiritual formation through Scripture reading, time in prayer with God, timely confession of sin, and giving up of things that distract, is making a decision to be filled with the Spirit of God. It is the author’s belief that if the Holy Spirit has entered a life, then he will never depart as the seal that God has placed according to Ephesians 1:13-14. However, one can live in such a way as to quench him. It is the choice of the believer as to how he will live.

### **Spiritual Formation and the Church**

When Christ instituted his church, he was not simply creating an organization. Rather, he was creating a community in which weary souls could come and find rest, where imperfect saints could be readied for the battle ahead of them. He was also creating an army to advance His Kingdom into the world.

As it relates to spiritual formation, there is no other organization in the world, except perhaps the Christian family, that is more important for the spiritual formation of

men and women than the church of Jesus Christ. It is in the church that believers learn Scripture, and any church that is doing church in the way it should be done is teaching people how to read their Bible. Philip Yancey, quoting Paul Tournier, said, "There are two things we cannot do alone...one is to be married and the other is to be a Christian."<sup>32</sup>

Often, this author, during the time of response, or as some call it, "the invitation," would tell the church and non-members of the church that the Christian life was not meant to be done alone. Hebrews 10:24 states, "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." Literally, it means that believers are to provoke one another to do that which is right. Spiritual formation is something done personally, but it cannot happen in a vacuum. Spiritual formation is key to revitalizing dying churches. However, every member of the congregation must be invited to participate in the process. It cannot be only one who decides to go to the desert alone. She must take others with her, so that they all may be a part of the reviving.

The cause of the Great Commission to make disciples must be taken up by all.<sup>33</sup> People must be taught all that is in Scripture, and they need to be helped to move forward in their Christian walk. For some churches, the cause of evangelism has reigned supreme and they bring in people, baptize them, and then let them go to fend for themselves. Other churches have taken up the cause of fellowship, eating and drinking together, with hardly a concern for the outside world. Some churches have taken up

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<sup>32</sup> Philip Yancey, *Church Why Bother* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 37.

<sup>33</sup> Mathew 28:19.

the cause of having highly spiritual worship with God, and yet, they do not understand at all the God that they say they are worshiping. Still, others have taken up the cause of ministry, being very concerned about social justice, and making sure that the poor are taken care of, and yet have forgotten what it means to lead these dear ones to Christ. The process of discipleship means that if the exam question is multiple choice, then the answer is “all of the above” when it comes to the nature of the Christian church.

The Great Commission is clear: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”<sup>34</sup> Countless preachers encourage their flocks to do evangelism based upon this charge. Certainly, evangelism is a part of the Great Commission, but making disciples is more than just bringing a person to faith in Christ and getting them to get into a baptistery. Making disciples is a life-long process, and it should be the primary goal of any organization that calls itself a church.

Recently, at the end of a baptism class, a 40-year-old man asked, “Now that I am a member here, I get to have my funeral here, right?” This same man who gave up his drug addiction made a right decision about his living situation and began moving on with a changed life. Though his question was quite surprising for such a young man, it is a reminder that people do see church life as a life-long commitment. A church that is doing true ministry must find itself in balance, making these disciples, and then leading them on to the greater works that Christ has promised they would do.

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<sup>34</sup> Mathew 28:19.

Another important aspect of spiritual formation theology for a church is that it should be inclusive of all people. Speaking of his experience at La Salle Street Church in Chicago, Philip Yancey said, “I came to marvel at the gospel’s ability to speak simultaneously to rich professionals and also street people with no education.”<sup>35</sup>

The church is the place where believers are spurred on to formation. In thinking about the church, one understands there are different roles believers fill in the life of the body. The discussions below present theological reflections on how each role plays into the body’s formation.

#### Spiritual Formation and the Pastor/Elder

From the beginning, it should be stated that although there is no distinction in the eternal realm between those who are pastors and those who are not, those who teach are expected to live at a higher level of spiritual formation than those who do not.<sup>36</sup> It is the apostle Paul who stated “Be Imitators of Me as Imitate Christ.”<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the New Testament portrays a group of Apostles, the teachers of the early church, appointing others to do the physical labor so that they could tend to the study of the word.<sup>38</sup> In 2 timothy 1:6, Paul encourages Timothy a pastor to stir up the gift that

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<sup>35</sup> Yancey, *Church Why Bother*, 29.

<sup>36</sup> James 3:1.

<sup>37</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:1.

<sup>38</sup> Acts 6:1-7.



God has put in Him. Though certainly all believers have gifts,<sup>39</sup> Paul is speaking of his preaching and leading gift, which has come through years of formation led by both his mother and grandmother.

John Maxwell's famous statement is that "everything rises and falls on leadership."<sup>40</sup> If that statement is true, then much of what is happening in the spiritual life of a church rises and falls on what is happening in the pastor's spiritual life. This ought to give the pastor occasion to pause and reflect upon the health of his own spiritual formation.

A spiritual leader, and certainly the teaching pastor, pastor or senior pastor of a church, must set aside time to do absolutely nothing else but to spend time with his heavenly Father. Henry Blackaby states, "If leaders look upon their time with God as little more than an opportunity to gain a pithy devotional thought, they will often be tempted to forgo the experience in favor of expediency. If, however, leaders view their time as crucial consultation with the Creator of the universe, they will diligently guard it, regardless of the business of their day."<sup>41</sup>

Most senior pastors have the freedom to make their own schedules. Yet, because the work of ministry is never done, they often feel as if they have to make every moment of the day productive in the eyes of the world and of church members. So, when there is time to simply relax in the Lord, to spend time in prayer, to read the

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<sup>39</sup> 1 Peter 4:10.

<sup>40</sup> John Maxwell, accessed November 21, 2014, <http://www.johnmaxwell.com/about/meet-john/>.

<sup>41</sup> Henry and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 2001), 213.

Word unhurriedly, not trying to prepare for some time of teaching, they feel as if that time is wasted and should be used for something else that will make “progress.” This makes logical sense, but the reality is that without the rhythm of contemplation, prayer, and relaxed Bible study, a pastor will become ineffective for the ministry God has for Him.

A church pastored most recently by this author saw the need for personal pastoral rest years before the pastor came. The church’s personnel manual for leadership staff indicated they were to take off up to two days per week because of all the night and weekend work required.<sup>42</sup>

The secret to finding balance in ministry is to find those times when things are slow and spend it with the Lord. Of course, people need their pastors, and most pastors even of smaller congregations could be with people every waking hour of the day. Yet, if they choose to do so, this time with people will become unproductive. Over time, it will burn them out to the point where they will no longer have any effectiveness. Dr. Bob Dean, Director of Missions for the Dallas Baptist Association, discussing a confusion of priority in the pastorate, states, “We must be more concerned about who we are in Christ, then what we do for Christ.”<sup>43</sup>

Recently, a staff member who was transitioning into pastoral ministry from the heating and air-conditioning business noted that spiritual work, though much less

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<sup>42</sup> Grace Temple Baptist Church, “Personnel and Policy Manual,” 21.

<sup>43</sup> Dr. Bob Dean, interview by author, November 5, 2009.

physically tiring at the end of the day, was much more tiring because it was a spiritual kind of work.<sup>44</sup> It might be difficult to understand this, but Scripture implies this while talking about the world believers live in: “Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”<sup>45</sup>

F.F. Bruce says,

To resist those forces their natural strength and resolution will not suffice. The “panoply of God,” spiritual armor, is necessary. The word “panoply” which occurs several times in the Septuagint, is found once only in the NT outside our present passage—in the parable of the strong man armed in Luke 11:21-22, where one who is even stronger comes and strips him of his “panoply”—his armor which he trusted.” It denotes a complete outfit of personal armor, for defense and attack.<sup>46</sup>

Though attacks will come, the armor of God will help believers deal with them. The practice of spiritual disciplines allow believers to put on the armor of God. The belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, sword of the word, all of that armor can directly come out of one’s personal prayer closet. God has made it all available through prayer, spiritual reading, and various other disciplines. Without the consistent practice of spiritual disciplines, believers can become weak and powerless; with them, believers

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<sup>44</sup> Personal conversation with author.

<sup>45</sup> Ephesians 6:11-12.

<sup>46</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 403-404.

have all they need to establish a powerful connection with God and to ward off the enemy's attacks.

This is where the confusion is cleared. If a pastor is struggling against these attacks, then certainly he very easily could be always exhausted and be brought low by the seemingly insignificant details of life. It is when a pastor is tired that he is most likely to fall into sin. Those times of exhaustion must be recognized so that pastors can protect themselves and get proper physical and spiritual rest to recover.

A pastor should take time to go to somewhere to meet with God. Even Jesus called the disciples away for a period of rest.<sup>47</sup> Yet, in every one of those instances, Jesus prepared them for their next ministry assignment. It is also interesting to note that in instances where great need was present, Jesus did not ignore the need, but suspended his period of rest until the need was met. Bill Hybels, speaking to congregational leaders and elders in regard to holding pastors accountable, said,

Need I remind you again, these leaders may be great people, but they, too, were born in sin? And they, too, are being tempted, just like you are, every single day. In addition to that, they are carrying very heavy loads and are probably quite near psychological overload or flameout, which means they are fully capable of making wrong decisions. So those people who surround key leaders have an enormous responsibility to pray for the leader, to encourage the leader, to challenge the leader to godliness, and to admonish the leader in even the smallest form of character slippage."<sup>48</sup>

From personal experience over the years, being spiritually formed does not necessarily lead to huge crowds on Sundays or great visible success in ministry.

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<sup>47</sup> Mark 6:31-32.

<sup>48</sup> Bill Hybels, "'The Character Crisis' *Preaching Today*, Tape No. 57," accessed November 21, 2014, <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/1998/december/5510.html> .

However, without spiritual formation, if large crowds attend or visible success occurs, this will be short-lived. The absence of personal spiritual formation will only take the leader down a path of destruction until he is so burned out and used up that he is no longer fit for ministry. The pastor must pull close to the Father because he is the One the church really needs.

### Spiritual Formation and Congregational Leaders

The spiritual formation of congregational leaders is crucial for the church.

Writing from a Baptist viewpoint in which churches are congregationally governed, and pastors report to the congregation, and work with committees and deacons to carry out the mission of the church, leadership includes committee members, Sunday school teachers, deacons and other leaders.

All people, though they may not be called to be a pastor or an elder, have gifts, and they should use those gifts in the life of the church.<sup>49</sup> Every person who joins the church should be considered a prospect for congregational leadership.

Though it specifically references deacons, 1 Timothy 3:8-12 provides an ideal for which to hold all congregational leaders. A major key to what is happening in this text is that these leaders are to be worthy of respect. Walter L. Lieffeld says “worthy of respect” translates *semnos*, a word that describes a person of dignity, who both gives

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<sup>49</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, 27.

and receives appropriate respect.<sup>50</sup> The consistent practices of spiritual disciplines is the only way a person can be the kind of person that is going to be worthy of respect over the long haul. There is no other way to try and pull the heavy load of the qualities described here.

Upon arriving at Grace Temple, although the church was in decline, several leaders were still committed to the cause of Christ and to the growth of the church. The author's concern was that Grace Temple would lose this quality leadership as these leaders eventually moved off the scene because of death, age, or geography. So, a focus was placed on discipling a few of those leaders so that they could begin to reproduce themselves.

"Ten Qualities of a Grace Temple Leader," was circulated among them.<sup>51</sup> The first quality included a daily time of prayer, seeking God for wisdom in life and in the life of the church and having a personal devoted walk with the Lord. This quality was foundational to the other nine qualities. These qualities, as outlined in the appendix, are ways in which a person can be supportive of the church such as working in areas where needed, giving to the ministry of the church, and supporting the church leadership in times of difficulty.

The issues of backbiting and not supporting good leadership decrease. Those issues will simply no longer be the problem because a person who is in love with Jesus

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<sup>50</sup> Walter L. Liefeld, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 133.

<sup>51</sup> Appendix Ten Qualities of a Grace Temple Leader created by author June of 2010 for use in a leadership development class at Grace Temple Baptist Church.

deeply is more able to overcome the temptation commit those types of sin. Rather, they will begin to display a humble and gentle spirit that does not lead to jealousy and pride. Pride in the church's leadership is what usually leads to the greatest disunity. In a church that is being led by Christ, its leaders must lay their pride aside and push forward with humble spirits, giving completely and totally over to Jesus Christ. Spiritually formed leaders are the key to healthy churches.

#### Spiritual Formation and the Membership

Romans 12:1 provides clear instruction that spiritual formation is not just for the pastor and congregational leaders, but it applies to all Christians, regardless of their leadership role.

One of the basic lessons of hermeneutics is that when a conjunction such as "therefore" appears in the text, it must be considered to what that conjunction is referring. In the case of Romans 12:1, "therefore" is built upon the first eleven chapters that are deeply theological. Romans 12 begin the practical application of the preceding eleven chapters. Some have questioned why Paul would deal with practical matters in a book that is filled with deep doctrine. Yet, as Moo has said, "Such an attitude betrays a basic misunderstanding of theology and its significance. All theology is practical and all practice if it is truly Christian is theological."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Moo, *Romans*, NIVAC, 392.

Spiritual formation must be based upon proper theology because if it is not, it will only lead one down difficult and unnecessary roads. If sermons and Bible studies are filled with application only, they will have no solid biblical and theological foundation. If they are filled with theology only, they will have no practical place to go. Pastors should fill their sermons with theology, and from that theology, bring practical application that changes lives for the better.

Henry Blackaby says, “One of the key differences between leaders and managers is that managers are responsible for how something is done; leaders must also consider why it is being done and continually communicate this to their followers.”<sup>53</sup> In this case, Blackaby is speaking of strategic thinking. Yet, the most important “why” to the question of working hard at a job, taking care of a family, living a good life, and giving a life in service to God at the church is found in the pages of Scripture. If a person is given application of what they should do, and never told why they should do it, the application will be short-lived. This is also a powerful application for leaders who must understand the “why” of church. Only when they get to the why can they get to the place of loving God deeply.

### The Role of Preaching in Spiritual Formation

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<sup>53</sup> Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 211.



Having laid out the importance of personal spiritual formation for the pastor/elder, the leaders, and the members of a congregation, attention should be given to the role of the pastor's preaching in the spiritual formation of the congregation.

In 1980, W.A. Criswell wrote, “

Ten thousand times, the people are bombarded with what the politician says, what the psychiatrist says, what the psychologist says, what the editor says what the commentator says, what the man on the street says, what everybody says. But what we would like to know is: Does God say anything? If God has anything to say, what does God say? That is the assignment of the preacher. And when he delivers that message faithfully and well, the people are marvelously blessed.<sup>54</sup>

Today, preachers are challenged with the internet, 24-hour cable news, hundreds of channels, satellite radio, and so much more. People are bombarded by endless media venues. Yet, pastors must continue to lead people back to the sacred words of a holy God.

In 2 Timothy 3:14-17, Paul instructs Timothy that it is Scripture that prepares him for ministry. It is not unusual for pastors to become frustrated at times by the lack of workers, or by the lack of enthusiasm for the ministry that the ones who do work have. The frustration is real. Yet 2 Timothy states that it is the Word of God that builds up people for the ministry the Lord has for them.

Mark Dever, speaking of expositional preaching says, “An expositional preacher’s authority begins and ends with Scripture. Even as Old Testament Prophets and New Testament Apostles were given not just a commission to go and speak, but to speak a particular message, so Christian preachers today have authority to speak from God so

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<sup>54</sup> W.A. Criswell, *Criswell's Guidebook for Pastors* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1980), 61.

long as they speak His words.”<sup>55</sup> The best way to tend to the souls of a large number of parishioners in a church is by preaching Gods Word, bringing it to bear on the lives of the people.

Still, it should be understood that spiritual formation must be encouraged and is best done in smaller groups and even in one-on-one settings. The best way to have a person labor in ministry is to see that person becoming spiritually formed, to help them in the task of tending his own soul. However, too often the opposite occurs in churches. A willing soul who wants to work is placed somewhere in church ministry with an unintentional, though very real disregard, for the state of his soul.

### **Conclusion**

Theology is key to spiritual formation, and without it, there exists no foundation by which to engage proper spiritual formation. To understand that the Bible is the ultimate foundation for spiritual formation is a primary first step in doing the important work. In the next chapter, literature related to spiritual formation will be examined in light of the theology of this chapter and of Scripture. As Martin Luther tells us speaking of his own work,

I would gladly have seen all my books forgotten and destroyed; if only for the reason that I am afraid of the example. For I see what benefit it has brought to the churches, that men have begun to collect many books and great libraries, outside and alongside of the Holy Scriptures; and have begun especially to scramble together, without distinction all sorts of “Fathers” “Councils,” and “Doctors”. Not only has good time been wasted, and the study of the Scripture

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<sup>55</sup> Mark Dever, *What Is a Healthy Church?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007) 64.

neglected; but the pure understanding of the divine Word is lost, until at last the Bible has come to lie forgotten in the dust under the bench.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Martin Luther, *Works of Martin Luther with Introductions and Notes*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia, PA: A.J. Holman Company, 1915), 75 of 5530, Section 1.

## CHAPTER THREE

### LITERATURE REVIEW

*Plans fail for lack of counsel,  
but with many advisers they succeed.*

Proverbs 15:22

The story behind Israel's division into two kingdoms provides great insight into why a person must not ignore the advice of those who have gone before: "But Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders gave him and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and were serving him."<sup>1</sup> Rehoboam decided he would not lighten the workload of the people, as his father's advisors had advised. Instead, following the advice of his peers, he increased their burden. As a result, Israel divided and Rehoboam lost half of his kingdom.

In the area of spiritual formation, one must not attempt to go it alone, nor should one believe that the common wisdom of the day is the only wisdom to be grasped. In fact, the world of spiritual formation is full of many who walked the road before and who can be of help to fellow travelers. If one is to engage in a serious study of spiritual formation, one will greatly benefit by interacting with those who have gone before.

This chapter interacts with various authors to come to a few conclusions about the practice and disciplines of spiritual formation. The interactions revolve around five

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings 21:8.

selected topics important for a good spiritual formation foundation. In addition, literature written on these topics could be of great value to pastors and church leaders who are leading their churches in the practice of disciplines related to spiritual formation. The books chosen for this literature review are generally considered to be either classics on the topic or widely respected in the field.

The discussion begins where the last chapter left off, with theology. It moves from there to a discussion on the Word of God, which is foundational to all spiritual formation. Also, not to digress, but it should be said here that of all the books one could read on the topic of spiritual formation, the Holy Scripture must remain the primary text. It is the author's opinion that the Bible is the only book that should ever be used for *lectio divina*, and it should be the primary book read for living a life that is spiritually formed in Christ.

From the Holy Scripture, attention is turned to prayer, the means by which God has given believers to communicate with Him. The discussion moves from there to something that is very specific to this thesis-project's focus on spiritual formation, that of a church opening its doors to those who are unlike them. One key result of spiritual formation must be that believers become more open to people who are unlike them.

The final topic discusses leadership in the area of spiritual formation. This could be for the pastor, personally. However, much of what happens in the area of spiritual formation in a church is initiated and led by the laity. Still, a pastor must understand that if spiritual formation is to happen in his church, he should provide strong leadership in the disciplines.

## Theology

A person must have a strong and proper theology to be able to do spiritual formation well. Two key texts that address this issue are *Renovation of the Heart* by Dallas Willard and *Spiritual Theology* by Simon Chan.<sup>2</sup> Chan says, “Clearly, a proper conception of God—a theology that is faithful to God’s self-revelation—is essential to the development of an adequate Christian Spirituality.”<sup>3</sup> Keeping in mind that this thesis has just finished a complete chapter on theology in which God was examined, this following discussion will examine a theology of a personal God, a theology of spiritual discipline, and a theology of inclusiveness stemming from the inclusiveness of God that will help inform a later section that specifically deals with spiritual formation that results in an inclusive understanding of the church.

## The Personal God

The God of the Bible is a personal loving God who cares deeply about people.

Chan says, “The God of the Bible is a personal God working intimately in his creation

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<sup>2</sup> Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting On the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002); Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998). For additional resources, see also Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994); Wayne Grudem, *Christian Beliefs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005); Eugene Peterson, *Practice Resurrection* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010); Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999); Eugene H. Peterson, *The Jesus Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007); Stephen A. Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007). These two books were chosen because they, more than the others, deal very specifically with spiritual formation, and they are comprehensive. The other books from this secondary reading list either are not all-inclusive or do not deal specifically with formation. Grudem’s two books are excellent reads and are something that should be consulted when doing any kind of Theology but they are not specific to Spiritual Formation. Peterson’s books are excellent however they are not all inclusive. Alister McGrath’s book could have been in the top two; however, choices had to be made to narrow the focus.

<sup>3</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 40.

unlike the passionless nameless ones of Platonism who are far removed from the world and only remotely related to it by a hierarchy of intermediaries.”<sup>4</sup>

When a person finds God, that person is allowed to interact with God through Jesus. Hebrews 4:14-16 explains that Jesus is a high priest who understands the issues people endure. Therefore, because of his understanding, believers are able to approach the throne of grace with confidence. In the Old Testament system, people went to God through the priest; in the New Testament, believers are the priesthood.<sup>5</sup> When a person is able to come to God from this position as a child of God, according to 1 John 3:1 the disciplines then become a joy for them because, as has already been laid out in chapter two, they have the assurance that God loves them and wants to be with them.

### A Reflection on Discipline

In the forming of a personal theology of spiritual formation, it is important to understand that formation is a process. Both Chan and Willard feel that formation is, and must be, a process that is undertaken, not something that occurs automatically overnight. Chan says regarding what is called the “Rule of Life,” “A Rule of Life is not about observing a set of rules in order to make ourselves good and acceptable before God—that would be legalism. Rather, it is about living a life under a certain pattern of discipline in order to achieve ascetical proficiency.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 41.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Peter 2:9.

<sup>6</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 190.

Chan goes on to say that perhaps what people have done is come up with not a lack of rule, but an incomplete rule. He says, "Those of us who hold any kind of regular work, whether it be an eight to five job in an office or a dawn to dusk job in the field, establish a certain rhythm of life over time. The problem is not that we lack rule, but that over the years we have evolved a bad one."<sup>7</sup> People have the ability to "rule" their lives; it simply takes work and discipline.

Furthermore, in dealing with discipline, one must understand that he or she cannot become conceited, believing he or she has attained something. Even the Apostle Paul states, "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."<sup>8</sup> Willard says, "Attainments are like the manna given to the Israelites in the dessert, good only for the day (Exodus 16:4,20). Past attainments do not place us in a position of merit that permits us to let up in the hot pursuit of God for today, for now. Paul knew that, he knew that others missed it or forgot it to their great harm."<sup>9</sup>

### Heart Transformation Leading to True and Real Equality

In order for spiritual formation to begin, one must come to the place of knowing the personal God, and from that knowledge, to have a transformed heart. It must not

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<sup>7</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 190.

<sup>8</sup> Philippians 3:12.

<sup>9</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 81.



only be transformed, but it must be transformed to the character and the life of Christ.

This can only occur when one surrenders to Christ.

Dallas Willard makes an interesting statement, saying,

Indeed the only hope of humanity lies in the fact that, as our spiritual dimension has been formed, so it also can be transformed. Now and throughout the ages this has been acknowledged by everyone who has thought deeply about our condition...Disagreements have only to do with what in our Spirit needs to be changed and how that change can be brought about.<sup>10</sup>

He goes on to say this powerful word a few lines later, "His objective is eventually to bring all of human life on earth under the direction of his wisdom, goodness and power, as part of God's eternal plan for the universe."<sup>11</sup>

When this transformation takes place, everything else begins to fall into place.

God works in powerful ways, and social structures change. Listen to Willard on this point: "On the other hand, from those divinely renovated depths of the person social structures will naturally be transformed so that 'justice rolls and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream' (Amos 5:24)."<sup>12</sup>

Chan speaking about the transformation of the heart that takes place and what happens when it does, says,

The so called enlightened world, while paying lip service to the principle of human equality, the dignity of the human race and so on, has thrown up new and deep division based on jobs, professional qualifications and wealth. Friendship in Christ breaks down all such barriers. Even a free person and a slave can become friends (an impossibility according to Aristotle).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 14.

<sup>11</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 14.

<sup>12</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 15.

<sup>13</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 176.

Willard again brings this point to bear when he says,

According to the biblical picture, the function of human history is to bring forth an immense community of people, from “every nation and tribe and tongue and people,” who will be a Kingdom of priests under God (Revelation 1:6,5:10, Exodus 19:6), and who for some period of time in the future will actually govern the earth under him (Revelation 5:10). They will also, beyond that reign with him in the eternal cosmos forever and ever (Revelation 22:5).<sup>14</sup>

When one considers what God does in the end, it should certainly affect how one lives in the present. If a person is being truly transformed into the image of Christ, then by definition, he will be open to loving others regardless of race, income, or any factor. This must be evident in any theology of spiritual formation, because though it may only be a result, it is perhaps the most evident of any other result one may see from being spiritually formed.

### Holy Scripture

The Bible must be the primary text in the practice of spiritual formation. To come to a place of spiritual formation, one must have a clear understanding of Scripture and must spend time deeply studying it on a daily basis. One must humbly come to Scripture, submitting to its authority, and not asserting authority over it.

In this section, Eugene Peterson’s, *Eat This Book* and Richard Foster’s, *Life With God* will be explored to present this argument.<sup>15</sup> Peterson states, “The Christian

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<sup>14</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 217-218.

<sup>15</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Eat This Book* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006); Richard Foster, *Life With God* (San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 2008). For additional resources, see also Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading* (Liguori: Liguori, 1997); C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York, NY: Mariner, 1964); J. Scott Duvall

scriptures are the primary text for Christian Spirituality. Christian Spirituality is, in its entirety, rooted in and shaped by the scriptural text.”<sup>16</sup> Scripture must play an important role in spiritual formation. For to know God is to know His word. The most common way he speaks to his children is through his word.

### Scripture Is Where God Primarily Speaks

A foundation of spiritual formation must be built on reading and meditating on Holy Scripture. To know God deeply requires knowing him through his word. Now, while God speaks to a person’s spirit, and perhaps, for a few, God has spoken audibly, for the most part God speaks through the reading of, and meditation on, his word.

Scripture comes directly from God: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Scripture is eternal: “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God

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and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012); Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in 10,000 Places* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008); Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 1991). The Two books selected for the Scripture portion of the Literature Interaction passage were done so because of the attention they gave to the Spiritual reading of scripture and how scripture is not just read for understanding, or for teaching, but rather it is read for the life change that comes only from God. However the two books also held a high regard for scripture, and I think would put it before any other books. The other books listed here either have to do with a specific book of scripture, or a type of reading. *Sacred Reading* by Casey and *Grasping Gods Word* by Duvall and Hays, in a sense balance each other out. *Sacred Reading* has everything to do with reading scripture for life change. *Grasping Gods Word* is very much a book on how to read scripture properly. Both are needed if we are to properly read the Word. It is fascinating to read both a Catholic Monk, and two Baptist Bible College Professors and think of how their work really does compliment the other.

<sup>16</sup> Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 15.

<sup>17</sup> 1 Timothy 3:16.

endures forever.”<sup>18</sup> In Revelation, John exhorts his readers regarding the divine written revelation, saying,

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.<sup>19</sup>

If these words are true, certainly God has spoken through Scripture.

### Scripture Comes Alive

With the foundations of Scripture’s authoritative and eternal nature, attention may be given to Scripture’s way in which it enlightens the soul. Peterson gives some insight into this by paraphrasing Karl Barth’s story about people who have been stuck in a warehouse their entire lives:

What would happen though, if one day one of those kids cut a door out of the warehouse, coaxed his friends out, and discovered the immense sky above them and the grand horizons beyond? That is what happens, writes Barth when we open the Bible—we enter the totally unfamiliar world of God a world of creation and salvation stretching endlessly above and beyond us.<sup>20</sup>

God really does want people to dive into his Word because his Word provides the key to genuine life. One can search for a relationship with God through nature or other means; yet, they will never fully find it without reading the Holy Scripture.

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<sup>18</sup> Isaiah 40:8.

<sup>19</sup> Revelation 22:18-19.

<sup>20</sup> Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 7.

This same thought is echoed by Foster. Foster states, "'Spiritual formation' is the process of transforming the inner reality of the self (the inward being of the Psalmist) in such a way that the overall life with God seen in the Bible naturally and freely comes to pass in us."<sup>21</sup> This is an important concept to understand for the person who is engaging God through Scripture in the discipline of spiritual reading. The Bible is not primarily a book to be studied, though that is important; the Bible is primarily a book that changes our lives. When a church encourages its people to engage Scripture in this way, it will see growth in those who do. The church will also experience an overall increase in church health that comes from this level of engagement with scripture.

### Humbly Submitting to Scripture

It is important to understand that spiritual formation as defined by this thesis-project does not happen without Scripture. One does not come to the place of truly knowing God without knowing him through his word. It is important to read the Bible with a humble heart that is ready to submit to what God says. Yet, too often, pastors, preachers, teachers, laity, and biblical scholars interpret Scripture, tightly holding to their canon within the Canon, instead of humbly submitting to its authority.

If the Bible is the unchanging and eternal Word of God, it must be approached with a humble attitude, allowing it to shape the reader rather than the reader shaping it. Foster says, "Such humble submission to the text allows God to share the attitude

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<sup>21</sup> Foster, *Life With God*, 10.

and posture of our hearts. There is a great freedom in such submission-the freedom to lay down the heavy burden of 'getting it right,' or seeing what we think we need to see."<sup>22</sup>

Another important task to humbly approaching Scripture is to read what others have to say about the reading of Scripture. Reading books such as those by Foster and Peterson can provide a perspective on Scripture that otherwise may not have been seen.

#### Scripture as the Anchor

For the purpose of this thesis-project, a final truth that Peterson, Foster, and others point to related to Scripture is that it is an anchor in the midst of a tumultuous world. Broadly speaking, humanity lives in a confusing and uncertain world. Scripture enters this wandering existence and provides the assurance the world genuinely desires.

While commenting on Barth's commentary on *Romans*, Peterson states, "It was the first in a procession of books that in the years to come would convince many Christians that the Bible was giving a truer, more accurate account of what was going in the their seemingly unraveling world that what their politicians and journalists were telling them."<sup>23</sup> People of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, like those of Barth's day and those of Paul's

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<sup>22</sup> Foster, *Life With God*, 33.

<sup>23</sup> Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 5.

day, need an anchor that is going to provide real truth. Scripture is that anchor, that one place the world can turn to find that truth.

Believers live in a world of bad news, but because they have Scripture, they do not have to settle for the bad news. Foster says that, “in the Bible’s plotline, sooner or later bad news is always followed by good news.”<sup>24</sup> This is the anchor of Scripture. It hands people the good news they need in a world so full of bad. Therefore, reading Scripture daily can remind the believer that life will one day get better, that this world is really not his ultimate home, and that there is good news in the midst of all the bad.

Again, Scripture is the primary text by which people are spiritually formed. The supporting evidence is clear: first, Scripture is God-breathed, it is everlasting, and it is unchanging; second, Scripture is alive and well within his people, bringing about change; and third, Scripture is an anchor, balancing the bad news, and reminding all that God is still present, even in the midst of this fallen world.

### Prayer

In addition to reading the Bible, prayer is a key element in becoming the spiritually formed person God has called each believer to be. Three books that address prayer help to discuss this subject: Eugene H. Peterson’s *Tell it Slant*, Richard Foster’s *Prayer*, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible*.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Foster, *Life With God*, 43.

<sup>25</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Tell It Slant: A Conversation On the Language of Jesus in His Stories and Prayers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008); Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2002); Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2004). For additional resources, see also Philip

Discussing the importance of prayer, Foster states,

For too long we have been in a far country: a country of nose and hurry and crowds, a country of climb and push and shove, a country of frustration and fear and intimidation. And he welcomes us home: home to serenity and peace and joy, home to friendship and fellowship and openness, home to intimacy and acceptance and affirmation.<sup>26</sup>

It is Foster's basic outline for prayer of Moving Inward, Moving Upward, and Moving Outward that provides the structure for the following discussion of prayer as a major key to the life of spiritual formation.

### Moving Inward

To truly be a prayerful person, one must first examine himself inwardly; he must weigh his inner man. Peterson, speaking of the inner man, says, "There is far more that cannot be [empirically] weighed: thoughts and knowledge, feelings and moods, dreams and visions, words and numbers, prayer and songs, faith and love, and hope, habits and memories. Most, in fact, of who and what we are cannot be discovered by cutting us open and examining our guts."<sup>27</sup>

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Yancey, *Prayer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010); James M. Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1998); Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000); Norman Shawchuck and Rueben P. Job, *A Guide to Prayer for All Who Seek God* (Nashville, TN: UpperRoom, 2006); Richard J. Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2005). A wealth of great leadership exists on the subject of prayer. In this chapter, it was decided to focus on three classics on the subject. They were chosen for a variety of reasons, but mainly because they are the very best on the topic, in the opinion of the author. However, the reader will see that the additional reading lists several other books that are also excellent on the subject.

<sup>26</sup> Foster, *Prayer*, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Peterson, *Tell It Slant*, 133.



Foster reflecting on the prayer life of biblical heroes, states, “Those folk of faith knew the examen of God, and they experienced it not as a dreadful thing but as something of immeasurable strength and empowerment.”<sup>28</sup> One must come to the place of examining their heart, their motives, the interior of their souls, and laying this all bare before a Holy God. It is then that he is able to discover true spiritual formation.

Peterson, looking deeper at this issue of having a true examen in our hearts, makes this statement from the Lord’s prayer,

Forgive us our debts. Forgive us for our failure to keep honest accounts with our neighbors. Forgive us for refusing the gifts that are given and stealing what is not ours to have. Forgive us to for using the gift of language to deceive. Forgive us for using the gift of sexuality to seduce. Forgive us for using the gift of strength to abuse and murder. Forgive us for using the gift of plenty to impoverish others.<sup>29</sup>

The soul must be examined, and confession must be a serious part of prayer, before one can find true formation in Christ.

### Moving Upward

Foster’s second movement in prayer is for the person to look upward. Although this is the second movement, the believer must understand that this does not put God second. Even when examining the self first, the believer must do it with a heart that looks up to God because it is God who brings a person to the place of repentance; repentance does not begin within the person.

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<sup>28</sup> Foster, *Prayer*, 27.

<sup>29</sup> Peterson, *Tell it Slant*, 185.

With this in mind, Foster discusses the adoration Christians should give the Holy God they love and adore. He states "Prayer is the human response to perpetual outpouring of love by which God lays siege to every soul. When our reply to God is most direct of all, it is called adoration."<sup>30</sup> Although God does not need our adoration, he desires it.

The prayer life of the believer must be one that constantly looks upward because he discovers what true prayer is when he looks to God. The prayer life of the believer is developed when he looks to God. Foster writes, "To be sure, the self sufficiency of God is a precious doctrine, but we should always remember the words of Saint Augustine: 'God thirsts to be thirsted after.'"<sup>31</sup>

Foster also deals with the idea that one finds rest in the upward movement of prayer. He says, "Through the prayer of Rest God places his children in the eye of the storm. When all around us is chaos and confusion, deep within we know stability and serenity."<sup>32</sup> Not only does one find rest when she comes into the arms of a holy, powerful and loving God, one also is simply "found."

Peterson, discussing Luke 15, states that both sons are lost. He gives an interesting perspective on how he imagines the story could have ended: "In a shock of recognition, one of the murmurers-a Pharisee? A Bible Scholar? Gets it: 'I'm the brother. This is me! And my lostness exceeds all other lostnesses. I'm the one. And

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<sup>30</sup> Foster, *Prayer*, 81.

<sup>31</sup> Foster, *Prayer*, 85.

<sup>32</sup> Foster, *Prayer*, 93.

I'm found! The Father has found me.'"<sup>33</sup> The theme that goes through both of these statements is looking to the Father. As the younger brother, one looks to the Father in the midst of chaos. Or, as the older brother, one must look to the father because he needs him just as much. Sinners find rest; rest from the pigpen, and rest from the need to work to put oneself in heaven.

### Moving Outward

Foster's third movement in prayer is that one's prayer life move outward to include others. One of the first things one must consider when moving their prayer life out to others is the all-important activity of intercessory prayer. Speaking about intercessory prayer, Foster reflects on the Exodus 17 battle, saying, "In the Military annals Joshua was the commander who won the victory that day. He was the person up front and in the thick of the conflict. But you and I know the rest of the story. Back behind the scenes the battle of intercession was won by Moses Aaron and Hur."<sup>34</sup>

Corporate prayer is another form of outward prayer. Believers are encouraged to engage in solitary prayer and in corporate prayer. In fact, one of the main reasons Christ left his followers in the world was to pray for one another, and in doing so, praying together. James 5:16 says, "Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can

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<sup>33</sup> Peterson, *Tell It Slant*, 97.

<sup>34</sup> Foster, *Prayer*, 192.

accomplish much.” Bonhoeffer says in *Life Together*, “The prayer of the Psalms teaches us to pray as a community. The body of Christ is praying, and I as an individual recognize that my prayers are only a tiny fraction of the whole prayer of the church.”<sup>35</sup>

### Inward, Upward, and Outward

Prayer must be balanced: one must look upward, look inward, and look outward to be able to pray properly. If one lives her life without these rhythms, she will not have the proper spiritual formation necessary. Each of these movements develops something in believers that is needed for proper spiritual formation. Without other believers, the believer will fall flat. Without God, the believer will remain lost. And, without a constant inward look, the believer could miss very important areas of his life that need work.

### To Welcome the Alien and the Outcast

A church’s spiritual formation should lead that church to accept all people, regardless of race, income or background leading them into the discipline of hospitality for all men. Unfortunately, people tend to limit their associations to people who are just like them. In the same way, churches tend to operate in ways that somehow limit their regular attendance to a single race. In most cases, this is not the intent of the congregation. On the other hand, the church that is spiritually formed will be a body of believers that is open to all people who come seeking a genuine life with Christ.

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<sup>35</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible*, 57.

In this section, two important works will contribute to the discussion of diversity: *Streams of Living Water* by Richard Foster and *A Many Colored Kingdom* by Gary Parrett, Steven Kang, and Elizabeth Conde-Frazier.<sup>36</sup>

#### What Is Our Samaria?

John 4:4 says that Jesus “had to go through Samaria.” Parrett, Kang and Conde-Frazier note, “The Trip through Samaria was both undesirable and potentially dangerous for Jewish travelers and therefore many simply avoided this route. It seems more likely that the ‘ought’ in this case is missional not geographical.”<sup>37</sup> Jesus was not going through Samaria for practical reasons; he went there because his life was on a mission.

In light of the Samaria narrative, Parrett and his co-writers suggest that the reader ask an important question of his own life: “Which people may represent such a Samaria to me, to us. Do I, do we, have to pass through this Samaria as Jesus passed through his? If so what does this mean in practical terms?”<sup>38</sup> This question may be asked in any church, but only a church that is genuinely spiritually formed will be prepared to answer the question properly. A church that is genuinely spiritually formed

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<sup>36</sup> Richard J. Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: HarperOne, 2001); Gary A. Parrett, S. Steven Kang, and Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, *A Many Colored Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004). For additional resources, see also Gary L. Thomas, *Sacred Pathways* (Nashville, TN: Zondervan, 2002); Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2004); Patty Lane, *A Beginner’s Guide to Crossing Cultures* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002); Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Connections* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP), 2002. Books in this particular area that deal specifically with spiritual formation are not as broad as some of the other topics. These books are helpful in understanding various cultures as well as bringing Christian unity.

<sup>37</sup> Parrett, Kang, and Conde-Frazier, *A Many Colored Kingdom*, 70.

<sup>38</sup> Parrett, Kang, and Conde-Frazier, *A Many Colored Kingdom*, 70.

will be able to look to its neighborhoods and truly have a desire to see God work powerfully in bringing all people to the throne room of God.

Churches must understand that cultural diversity implies they may sometimes view things in a different way than their neighbors. Certainly, churches need a theological base that is unshakeable; a church must have certain beliefs that are based in Scripture and on which everyone can agree. However, often churches turn non-essential cultural issues into essential beliefs of the body. For a church to begin to reach its community with the life-changing gospel of Christ, it must return to Scripture to determine what is essential, and in many cases, to discard the non-essential.

In *Streams of Living Water*, Foster does make an excellent point when he says “Today our sovereign God is drawing many streams together that heretofore have been separated from one another. It is a little like the Mississippi River, which gains strength and volume as the Ohio and Missouri and many others rivers flow into it. So in our day God is bringing together a mighty ‘Mississippi of the Spirit.’”<sup>39</sup> This is the kind of thing that must occur if churches are going to welcome all people.

It is not that every church must lose its distinctiveness or be non-denominational. However, the church must be open to all people regardless of background and religious tradition. It is not that churches should not have some sort of assimilation process that teaches the genuine doctrine of that local body. However, the church must be, in many ways, open to doing church in a different way. So, if a person is moved to raise holy hands, they must be able to do so without fear of reproach. If a

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<sup>39</sup> Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, xv.

person chooses to kneel at an altar, they must be allowed to do so without a great level of discomfort. This is seemingly the only real way that all people will be welcomed at the table of God's grace.

Foster describes various traditions in his book. It is important to understand that although people may not agree with all of them, it does not necessarily make those traditions wrong. He goes on to say,

In reality these different traditions describe various dimensions of the spiritual life. We find their emphasis throughout the teaching of Scripture—from the Pentateuch to the prophets, from the wisdom literature to the Gospels, from the Epistles to the Apocalypse. And many are the lives that illustrate these themes: Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Moses, Ruth David Hannah, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Mary, Peter Elizabeth, Paul, Tabitha, Lydia, John...the list could go on and on.<sup>40</sup>

When one realizes that the pages of Scripture contain all sorts of people, and welcomes all races to the table of God's grace, it is only natural for the spiritually formed believer to do the same. It was sin that caused humanity to be torn apart in the first place. From the sin that occurred in Eden to the tower of Babel, sin had its effect in tearing down the common bonds and the common language that held humanity together. Yet, as 1 Peter 2:10 teaches, "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God." Being in Christ and being formed into His image produces unity in the midst of diversity, regardless of cultural backgrounds. Peter's epistle is written to people who are scattered about, who have no common bond apart from the fact that

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<sup>40</sup> Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, xvi.

they are chosen by God.<sup>41</sup> A spiritually formed person will welcome all people to the table of God's grace with open arms.

### Leading in Spiritual Formation

The leadership of the pastor, the ministerial staff, and the laity of a church is key to developing spiritually formed people and leaders who can make an impact in a community for the cause of Christ. Two primary texts that contribute to this discussion are J. Oswald Sanders's *Spiritual Leadership*, and Henry and Richard Blackaby's *Spiritual Leadership*.<sup>42</sup>

### Spiritual Formation of the Leadership

Church leadership must be formed spiritually and must take the proper time to rest if they are to remain effective. Their relationship with the Father should be deep and abiding. John states, "I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you,

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<sup>41</sup> 1 Peter 1:1.

<sup>42</sup> J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer*, [Updated ed. (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2007); Henry & Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People On to God's Agenda*, rev. ed. For additional resources, see also Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 1999); John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002); Henry J.M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2003); Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Ed. (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1998); Howard Baker, *Soul Keeping* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1998). The books chosen for this particular section have a great deal to do with the fact that they are very good and that they are classics on the subject. This is especially true of the two books by the same name, *Spiritual Leadership*. The other two texts were chosen for the specific topics they represent. They are very good books to help a church leader both cope with the task of leadership and perform it well.



young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.”<sup>43</sup> Though a leader may not be to the level of Father as of yet, it should be obvious to all who are in the congregation that he is moving in that direction.

### **Healthy Leaders, Healthy Churches**

Although it is not strictly about the disciplines, Sanders’s *Spiritual Leadership* has much to say about being a spiritual leader. Sanders writes, “Spiritual leadership transcends the power of personality and all other natural gifts. The personality of the spiritual leader influences others because it is irradiated, penetrated, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. As the leader gives control of his life to the Spirit, the Spirit’s power flows through Him.”<sup>44</sup>

This not only leads to furthering the cause of spiritual formation, it also leads to overall church health. Spiritually formed people and spiritually formed leaders lead to healthy and vibrant churches. Spiritually formed people tell others about their faith, and spiritually formed people work hard in the various Kingdom building ministries of the church. Spiritually formed people give generously to support the work of the Body, and spiritually formed people love one another, making the church an attractive place for the lost to come and find rest.

### **Leadership Selection**

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<sup>43</sup> 1 John 2:14.

<sup>44</sup> Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 28.

Sanders also addresses the selection of leaders, and he asserts that the key factor in selecting a leader must be the spiritual condition of that person. He says that the

Selection of Kingdom leaders must not be influenced by worldly wisdom, wealth or social status. The prime consideration is spirituality. When a church or missions organization follows a different set of criteria, it essentially removes the Spirit from leadership. As a consequence, the Spirit is grieved and quenched, and the result is spiritual dearth and death for that place.<sup>45</sup>

The spiritual heads of our churches must have a depth of spirituality that is pervasive in their lives and that comes out into the church itself.

Henry and Richard Blackaby make a very interesting statement about how one becomes a leader: "In people's attempt to enlist a following, some have resorted to developing the appearance of a leader rather than developing the character of a leader."<sup>46</sup> Both Blackaby and Sanders hit very close to the heart of the matter when they talk about the importance of who the leader is, not necessarily what the leader does.

### **Conclusion**

The themes addressed here are key in seeing the revitalization of a church that has moved in a downward spiral. Theology has a key place because, without it, you have no foundation for the spiritual formation you are doing. To understand God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is vital to proper formation. Holy Scripture is also

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<sup>45</sup> Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 80.

<sup>46</sup> Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 87.

vital because without Scripture one simply cannot do proper theology. Humbly submitting to Scripture is perhaps the most important part of doing proper spiritual formation. A proper reading of Holy Scripture then leads one to a life of prayer. Moving inward, upward and outward is a good way to see outline your prayer life.

The disciplines of humbling submitting to scripture lead us to the two action disciplines discussed at the end of the chapter. They are two-fold, being hospitable to all people that God created, and providing proper spiritual leadership. These two disciplines, which could also be described as practices, or attitudes, lead a church toward revitalization. It is not likely that a church will be able to see the kind of turn around that so many need without these two practices or attitudes in place.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROJECT DESIGN

This thesis-project seeks to answer how spiritual formation helps in the revitalization of established declining churches? For the purpose of this study, the research will look specifically at Grace Temple Baptist Church during the years between 2000 and 2013. It marked a period of decline that spans the ministries of three pastors, until 2009 when it leveled off, and into 2010 when growth began to occur. This initial growth immediately followed a period of corporate fasting and prayer in the church.

The study of Grace Temple for this extended period of time reinforced an understanding that spiritual formation can lead to growth in all areas of a church, regardless of who the current leadership may be. The presence of a particular leader is not essential to revitalization. From 2009 to 2013, the numerical growth in the church continued after the departure of one pastor and the arrival of a second. Rather, revitalization seems to have occurred because the church began a ministry of prayer, fasting, and intense Bible study. The full setting of Grace Temple's decline and initial efforts at spiritual formation may be found in the first chapter.

While the research suggested that spiritual formation is a foundational key to church growth and revitalization, it did not demonstrate that programming or leadership had nothing to do with a church turning around. It is from the place of being spiritually formed that people become active in sharing their faith, giving to the work of the church, and working in the various ministries of the church. Thus, formation is not

the key to growth; however, it is a foundational key that seems to need to come before all others. During the period that Grace Temple experienced a great revitalization, the church also incorporated programming that would minister to a community that had changed a great deal since the church began in 1940. The Spanish-speaking ministry was the most significant program added to Grace Temple, and a pastor who believed strongly in the disciplines of spiritual formation heavily influenced it. For more information on church revitalization see *Come Back Churches* by Ed Stetzer<sup>1</sup> and *Turn Around Church* by George Barna.<sup>2</sup> Both talk about a variety of factors for church turnaround, one factor being spiritual formation.

The thesis-project examined the effects of spiritual formation on the life of individuals within the body. The project itself involved a 35-day period in the life of the church during which the basics of spiritual formation were introduced. However, this followed two previous 40-day periods of fasting and prayer. So, although the project is a large part of the research, it is not the only data examined to explore the correlation between spiritual formation and church revitalization. The results of the first two formation experiences and the on-going spiritual formation may be found in chapter one in its description of the specific setting Grace Temple was in when this project was implemented.

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<sup>1</sup> Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> George Barna, *Turnaround Churches: How to Overcome Barriers to Growth and Bring New Life to an Established Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1997).

## **The Project**

The members of Grace Temple Baptist Church participated in a 35-day spiritual formation emphasis from October 4, 2012 to November 7, 2012. The goal was to give them a greater grasp of spiritual formation principles. While prepared devotionals covered 35 days, participants were encourage to continue the spiritual fast they had chosen for a full 40 days.

### **Project Design**

During the spiritual formation emphasis, the church entered into a time of fasting, prayer, and five weeks of devotionals, discussion groups, and sermons that encouraged people towards spiritual formation practices.

The project was designed to engage people every time they came to church, and every day of the week. Every devotional day led to Wednesday night discussions. The devotionals were short and simple so that participants were able to dig deeper into them. They varied in their design to accomplish different results. Some had specific reflection questions; others encouraged broader reflection on a topic.<sup>3</sup> The devotional book is provided for the reader's own use and reference.

For example, on the second day of the experience the question was asked, "How hard has it been for you to give up what you are so used to doing?" This question referenced the activity the person had chosen to fast from during the experience. This

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<sup>3</sup> Appendix B, 40 Days to Beginning Spiritual Formation Participant Guide.

was a more specific reflection question. Another question on this same day that was intended to bring a broader response was, “What lessons do you think you will learn by truly laying down your desires and following after Jesus?”

On another day, participants were asked to consider the effect of media on their lives with the question, “Give voice to these questions in your journal: How does having 24-hour access to media affect you in positive ways? How does it affect you in negative ways?” One question even challenged people to take an inventory of their lives to come to a greater understanding of where they were spending the greatest amount of their time. By design, this happened on the third day of the first week so that participants could reflect on this throughout the spiritual formation emphasis experience.

The project had three major components. The first was the Sunday morning preaching. The preaching schedule is located in the appendices, and it is important to note the topics discussed because it was the pastor’s primary opportunity to explain spiritual formation to members of the congregation with the hopes of inspiring them to participate in spiritual disciplines.<sup>4</sup> Sunday morning preaching, by its position in the church calendar, in the church tradition, and in the minds of church attendees, holds the most prominent place in the church week. Sunday morning worship is when people are most likely to come, and when most people are likely to gather. During this service, it was important to have a few copies of the devotional books on hand.

The weekly messages were directly related to the devotional topics in content. For adults, the Sunday morning message fell in the middle of the week’s devotional; for

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<sup>4</sup> Appendix A, Preaching Schedule for Spiritual Formation Emphasis.

example, the sermon about fasting, delivered on October 7, was related to devotionals that began on October 4. Having the Sunday morning messages directly related to the devotionals encouraged the entire church to engage spiritual formation at some level. Each Sunday extra devotional books were made available for those who wanted to start doing the devotional.

Though they were distributed at the beginning of the process, some chose to engage at a later point in the process. Thom Rainer suggests that people are no longer attending church as regularly as they once did.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, it was likely that a large number of the active membership of the church was not present when the books were originally distributed. Having a few on hand to either sell or give away allowed people to engage in the process when God dealt with them on it. The author prepared 100 English books and 75 Spanish books; about 75 percent of these were distributed. Another important part of the design process was making sure people were aware that if they got off on the days, or started late, they could continue participating in the process.

The second component of the emphasis was a daily devotional guide that helped a person to digest the discipline throughout the week. The point of the devotional guide was not to replace what someone was already doing in their daily Bible reading. Rather, it was an addition to that daily Bible reading. As stated earlier, the church had

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<sup>5</sup> Thom Rainer, “# 1 Reason for decline in church attendance,” *Thom S. Rainer* (blog), August 19, 2013, accessed November 7, 2014, <http://thomrainer.com/2013/08/19/the-number-one-reason-for-the-decline-in-church-attendance-and-five-ways-to-address-it/>.



already been challenged to read through the Bible in a year; a challenge that was renewed each year and one in which many were participating.

It is important to understand that if a church's membership is generally not reading the Scripture on a regular basis, having a more expanded Bible reading each day may be appropriate. This author feels strongly that the disciplined, regular, reading of God's word is important for any spiritual formation journey. Eugene Peterson says, "Through the centuries people have found that they preferred other ways of going about this business of finding direction and guidance for living the Christian life. But the church community has consistently said 'no' to them and kept a firm grip on this text, this authoritative Bible."<sup>6</sup> Challenging a church family to read the Bible through in one to three years can be a life-changing experience for any congregation. The reason for this can also be found in Peterson's great volume on spiritual reading, "We read the Bible the way it comes to us, not in the way we come to it; we submit ourselves to the various and complementary operations of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, we receive these words so that we can be formed now and for eternity to the glory of God."<sup>7</sup>

The devotionals were designed to direct the thoughts of people to the disciplines of the week. Furthermore, they were designed to allow people a time of reflection each day that would help them dig deeper into the disciplines. A few reflection questions followed a short devotional. The reflection questions were kept to a minimum so that

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<sup>6</sup> Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 15.

<sup>7</sup> Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 31.

people could get through the devotional in less than 20 minutes. The reason for this was twofold: 20 minutes was not too long for those who were new to devotional reading, while for those who were doing other Bible reading were able to add this devotional and still keep the time less than 45 minutes. Keeping the time short was not to make it easy for people, but to encourage a larger number of participants, who had not previously been involved with these disciplines, to take part in the journey.

The third component of the project dealt with a weekly time of reflection. This occurred in two different settings at Grace Temple. The first occurred Sunday mornings with students from ages 12 to 18, and the second occurred Wednesday nights with most of the adults.<sup>8</sup> These times were specifically chosen because they were the times when the core of the youth group and the core of the church gathered.

The discussion groups were fairly simple. Participants were able to talk about what they had learned and experienced during the week. The meetings gave people opportunity to engage others who were doing the same exercises. This was important for several reasons. Two important reasons were that it encouraged those who were going through the process and it allowed people to learn from others. Although some aspects of spiritual formation are individual, others need to be done corporately as a body of believers.

The groups averaged about 15 members. In a church of 150, about 60 people actively participated in the spiritual formation emphasis. In our case, these were natural breaks that went along age, language lines, times they were available, and when the

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<sup>8</sup> Appendix C, 40 Days to Beginning Spiritual Formation Discussion Guide.

most committed were most likely to meet together. The groups were as follows, student ministry had about 15 students who met on Sunday morning, an English-speaking group that met during the normal prayer meeting time on Wednesday night, a Spanish-speaking group which met during the normal prayer meeting time on Wednesday night, and a group of about 15 comprised of the Wednesday night Children's ministry workers who met before the Wednesday night prayer meeting during dinner.

Again, simplicity was key to these meetings. An outline was produced that focused on the questions from the daily devotionals. For example, a question from the third week was, "From your time of devotionals this week, and from taking time to read through the prayer, talk about what God's greatest priorities in the world are."<sup>9</sup> Participants were encouraged to bring the devotional books with them so they could share from them. They were also encouraged to share openly about the struggles they had, particularly the struggles associated with their fasting. They were also encouraged to share how God was changing them. Three resources to put together something like this could include: Donald Whitney's *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*,<sup>10</sup> Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*,<sup>11</sup> and if you would like something that

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<sup>9</sup> Page 4 of the discussion guide in Appendix C.

<sup>10</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, Updated ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: the Path to Spiritual Growth*, 20th ed. (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco), 1998.

can be simply ordered and used, please contact the author on how to obtain copies of the devotional, "A Beginning."

### Assessment Design

The project had two assessment tools: a written survey and personal interviews.<sup>12</sup> The survey results are included in the appendices for the reader's reference, particularly in the extended discussion below of the results. The first survey looked at the spiritual formation practices of our members. The questions formed an inventory for people to examine their own lives. To assuage guilt and to get honest answers, there were actually five different answers from which a person could select in the multiple-choice section of the survey. One example of this was a question that stated, "I am likely to fast from something." The possible responses were Very Likely, Likely, Maybe, Unlikely and Very Unlikely. The questions dealt with several areas of spiritual formation including fasting, personal time with the Lord, and personal possessions.

The second survey was identical to the first, but with three questions added that addressed how the time concentrated in spiritual formation helped in the change process. These open-ended questions asked participants to write out how God had worked in them during this period.

It was difficult on both ends to have the completed assessments returned. This may have been due to the fact that the groups were spread out in a variety of different

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<sup>12</sup> Appendix D, Tabulated Results: Pre-Project Survey; Appendix E, Tabulated Results: Post-Project Survey.

ways. Only 30 people completed the first assessment on Wednesday night, October 3<sup>rd</sup>. This may be because most of the groups met during the regular prayer meeting time. Sixteen completed the second survey on Wednesday, November 7th. The issue of getting the second survey returned may have been because people were afraid to answer the final questions that asked for essay responses.<sup>13</sup> However, the answers from the assessments that were turned in provided excellent comments about the process.

The second assessment was a set of personal interviews conducted with a few key church members two years after the project was completed.<sup>14</sup> These included two staff members, the associate pastor and the youth minister, who served with the author while at Grace Temple. These two men were interviewed together by the author. The Associate Pastor is currently the Senior Pastor of Grace Temple. Because of the author's relationships with these two men, and because they are closer to the situation than anyone else, they provided the most useful feedback.

The two women were picked because they know the church well, they come from two different ethnic perspectives, and given their marked integrity, there was a high confidence that they would provide honest feedback.

These three indicators provided the best data to examine what this spiritual formation experience did in the life of Grace Temple.

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<sup>13</sup> Appendix F, Post-Project Essay Results.

<sup>14</sup> Appendix G, Staff Interviews; Appendix H, Interview: Middle-Aged English-Speaking Hispanic Woman; Appendix I, Interview: Older Angle Woman.

## Project Implementation

### The Devotional

Implementation began with the writing of the devotional book. This was important because nothing else on the general market seemed to give the exact emphasis the author desired, nor did one accomplish the desired emphasis the exact way the author wanted. As the devotional was written, it was reduced from six weeks to five; the five-week approach still covered the major disciplines of the spiritual formation emphasis. It felt as if this would be a better use of time as the discipline that was deleted was reflection; however reflection shows up in each daily journey. Although the devotional only spanned thirty-five days, participants were encouraged to fast from the habit they were giving up for a full forty days.<sup>15</sup>

Dating the individual entries of the devotional also needed attention. Although it was not something that absolutely had to be done, it was helpful to those who went through the experience because it kept everyone on the same page. However, as will

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<sup>15</sup> For more information on this kind of fasting see Texas Baptists, *30 Days and 30 Ways: to Missions* (Dallas, TX: Baptist General Convention of Texas, 2014), 1 pages 17-21.

be discussed below, it was also necessary to have different dates for the student books. The devotional book can be found in the appendices.

Another major endeavor to implement the project was to translate the project into Spanish. This was important because half of the participants were primarily Spanish speakers. Under the leadership of the associate pastor, who did most of the work, and others who did some translating and proofing, the devotional was completed in time for everyone to have a book. Translation of spiritual terms was not an easy task. Still, those who handled this important work did it carefully, and the finished product excelled.

### **Recruiting Participants**

The second part of the implementation was getting people to participate. People are busy in today's society. People also have an addiction for always wanting to be connected to media.<sup>16</sup> So, it was important to convince those who attended Grace Temple that spiritual formation was beneficial. In order to do this, the pastor and others shared their personal testimonies as they related to spiritual formation. Sunday morning sermons and scheduled announcements targeted spiritual formation. Promotional efforts not only happened in public, but they also happened in many private conversations throughout the church.

### **Additional Considerations**

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<sup>16</sup> "How Real a Risk Is Media Addiction?" CBS News, August 22, 2014, accessed February 6, 2015, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/how-real-a-risk-is-social-media-addiction/>. This article deals with both social media and general internet addiction.

Another part of the implementation involved exploring when the Wednesday night children's workers would engage the material because they did not participate in the regular prayer meeting. It was decided that they would have a group led by the pastor prior to the main Wednesday night service. Because Grace Temple already provided a meal, they were able to eat while they discussed the week's devotionals using the discussion guides. The meal was important because most of them came straight from work, and this particular group began at 5:30 PM.

It was also important to make sure that the student ministry of the church was able to participate. In multiple staff meetings, discussion revolved around the issue that the students who came on Wednesday nights did not form the core of the student ministry. Rather, the core students typically came on Sunday morning. So, it was decided that the students' spiritual formation group would meet on Sunday mornings. Because the books were actually dated for the Wednesday night meetings, the student books needed to be dated differently.

The implementation of the project was made more difficult by the fact that, in late August, the full-time assistant went on maternity leave. However, the person she trained to take her place did a really good job of helping us move things forward.

## Results

It is important to consider that during the time of the decline, Grace Temple added staff, added programming, remodeled the facilities, and engaged in a number of other things designed to bring a turn around. This is important to remember because



this is what the author as a pastor, and now as a denominational leader,<sup>17</sup> typically observes churches doing to bring about a turn around.

From 2008 to 2013, Grace Temple's average Sunday morning worship attendance went from 90 to 175,<sup>18</sup> and at the time of the author's departure, it was still climbing. This shows up in the annual church profile that was submitted by the church secretary each year to the Dallas Baptist Association, which is then passed to the Baptist General convention of Texas to be then given to the Southern Baptist Convention. The results were obtained from the Baptist General Convention of Texas, and the results were as far back as digital records were available. This sustained doubling of attendance in the church had not occurred in more than 40 years. In addition, The baptism rate went from single digits to double digits.<sup>19</sup> Grace Temple had to order new baptism robes during that time, which proved to be a very encouraging experience.

### **Results of the Project Itself**

The main tools used to quantify the results of the project was the survey that was conducted before and after the experience, three interviews with four different people regarding the overall, and specifically, the spiritual health of the church since the specific 35 day experience. The reason these results were taken into account is that

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<sup>17</sup> The author currently serve as Director of Urban Missions for the Baptist General Convention of Texas, a group of over 5500 Baptist churches in Texas.

<sup>18</sup> Appendix J, Grace Temple Annual Church Profile 1986-2013.

<sup>19</sup> Appendix J.

they would generally provide the best data. The interviews were added after the fact because enough information was not garnered from the survey results.

### The Survey

Following is a summary of the results with a complete tabulation available in the appendices.<sup>20</sup> The surveys proved to be difficult because not every participant completed the survey. As stated above, because the groups were spread out, not as many people as expected completed the first survey. The post-project survey may have been hindered by the embarrassment factor, as people did not want to write down things about their own spiritual formation. The pre-project survey was completed by 30 participants, and 16 individuals completed the post-project survey. This may have skewed the results to some extent. However, the essay part of the second survey does suggest that the project was a success in the lives of some.

Though the spiritual formation experience was for the entire church, some results of formation will appear in the lives of individuals, and that is what the essay questions of the second survey revealed for some. The second survey is included in the appendices to show exactly what was submitted after the experience was completed. Keep in mind this was on the last night of the project.<sup>21</sup> The interviews served to

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<sup>20</sup> Appendices D, E, and F.

<sup>21</sup> Appendices G-I.

understand the insights of the staff and members about the project. They also provided a look at the church two years after the project to see how God had worked in the life of the church since the spiritual formation experience. One must openly admit that other factors played a part in the success of the church; however, the point made here is that spiritual formation was a major contributing factor.

**Fasting.** People who completed the post-project survey were more likely to fast from something; however, the number of people who stated they were more likely to fast remained the same.<sup>22</sup> This coincided with the interview feedback that fasting needed to be taught more clearly. Two types of fasting were dealt with in the project. The primary type was spiritual fasting, or in other words fasting from something besides food. This was something that the church had done before. However, because of the attendance increase already referred to, there were new people in the church. It seems that it would have been better to do additional teaching on how to fast spiritually. Physical fasting, though discussed and encouraged, was not emphasized.

**Spiritual Formation.** The survey shows a basic understanding of spiritual formation was increased by the project.<sup>23</sup> The best results that could be found were on questions 10 and 11 in the post-project survey. Here are the survey questions and the results:

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<sup>22</sup> Appendix F.

<sup>23</sup> Appendices F-I.

- “On a regular basis I am likely to fast from something.” On this particular question, as will be seen with all of the questions, fewer people participated in the post survey than the pre-survey. So, it was expected that the results might be slightly skewed. However, this question did seem to indicate that the number of people who were unlikely to fast did go down. This may have been because people chose not fill out the second survey, or it could have been because people felt that fasting had a positive impact on their life, and so they wanted to do it again.
- “I take time for silence and spending time alone with the Lord.”<sup>24</sup> Although less people completed the second survey, it was interesting that this question indicated more people were practicing silence and spending time alone with the Lord more often. Obviously, the project encouraged that for a specific period of time; however, it should be pointed out that five weeks could have the potential to form the habit of silence and solitude in people.
- “I understand the term spiritual disciplines.”<sup>25</sup> On this question, the percentage of people who understood the term increased; only two people were not aware of what the term meant. This may be because the previous emphasis on spiritual formation may have already provided people some degree of understanding of the term spiritual disciplines. So, although the increase was a

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<sup>24</sup> Appendix D.

<sup>25</sup> Appendix D.

small one, it does seem to indicate that the project helped people understand the term.

- “When it comes to my possessions I am.”<sup>26</sup> The answers to this question showed no substantial change. It is the author’s belief that a 5 week period may not have been enough to change how one feels about his possessions.
- “When it comes to the Bible.” Less people said that the Bible was a struggle for them. So, there may have been a bit of success, here. When one is taught spiritual reading, and is given the freedom to do it, it should enhance their reading of the word.
- The next question that asks about a person feeling close to God is quite vague, and it should not have been included. Obviously, someone answering a question in church is unlikely to say that they do not feel close to God.
- Question 7, asking about regularly giving time to the Lord and his work, reported no noticeable change. Again, the author believes this is an issue of not enough time to see a major change.
- Question 8 indicated that a higher percentage of people stated they give to the Lord and His work. Though this again would normally take longer to quantify, the last week of the devotional reading dealt with living simply and giving. Thus, it would only be natural for a person to think in terms of their giving.
- The ninth question asked whether a person is likely to spend more time with the Lord or with tv or internet. Those who responded resulted in an increased

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<sup>26</sup> Appendix D.

percentage who stated they were more likely to spend time with the Lord.

Again, the devotionals and messages dealt with this directly, so a change in this area was expected to flow out of the 5 week period.

**Of Special Note.** The two most important question when it came to quantifying were the last two that appeared on the post-survey.

- **As a result of this time, I am more able to do spiritual formation in my life.** (More able -12, Less able-1, The same – 3)

Clearly, this is indicated people felt more equipped to do spiritual formation in their own life. The simple definition of formation, though never directly spelled out, was outlined in the devotionals and the Sunday morning messages. So, they had a clear understanding of what formation was, and they felt they were able to better practice the spiritual disciplines. The fact that three said it was the same for them on this particular question does show that people were being honest with this question.

- **As a result of this time, I am more able to lead someone in spiritual formation.** (More able -9 Less able -3 The same -4)

These questions sought to ascertain a person's ability to do spiritual formation for himself, and the ability he had to lead another person in spiritual formation. The answers for both questions were fairly clear that people believed they were more able to do both. Foster says about the importance of formation, "Remember we are always going somewhere. The ancient path of spiritual practice consists of choosing a

direction-either to be carried by the drift of the world around us, or to move with the currents of God's love."<sup>27</sup> Twelve out of sixteen respondents said they could do it better in their own life, and nine out of sixteen respondents said they could do better leading someone else.

Question 11 asked if the participants believed they were able to lead someone in spiritual formation. In the post-project survey, 9 said they were more able to lead someone in spiritual formation, 3 said they were less able to lead someone in spiritual formation, and 4 said it was the same. This question's purpose was to see, if through the project, leadership of any kind was developed. This question was only asked on the post-survey. It did seem that people felt more prepared to provide leadership in the area of spiritual formation. There may be two reasons for this. First, people had a clearer understanding in their own lives about formation from the devotionals and the Sunday morning messages. Second, the small groups were open discussion groups. So, when people openly discussed what was happening in their own lives through formation they were better able to teach others what they have learned. This is why the discussion guides were mainly questions.<sup>28</sup>

**Short Answer Questions.** One person responded to question 12, stating that he/she was "more aware of where my time has been going, more aware that the these things I

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<sup>27</sup> Foster, *Life With God*, 134-135.

<sup>28</sup> Appendix C.

fasted from did not add value to my life, more aware of my daily need for God and His word.”<sup>29</sup> Answering question 13, this same person indicated that his plan for the days ahead was to have “daily time w/Him prayer and study, regularly fasting from media as a way to gain back control when or if it is slipping away.”<sup>30</sup>

Another respondent to question 13 stated that she planned to “be more kind and gentle, Full of Holy Spirit in my thinking.”<sup>31</sup> Another answered question 12, saying, “I am more aware of how much time I spend on other things rather than the Lord.”<sup>32</sup> Regarding question 13, this same person said that he still needed to learn to “be still.”<sup>33</sup> This helps to point out that this experience was a beginning for some people. Another person said he planned to “be more patient and understanding.”<sup>34</sup> It was interesting to note that this theme appeared in all of the surveys. People were more apt to be patient and understanding. One respondent even mentioned that he was going to spend more time with his kids.<sup>35</sup>

These are not things that one would typically think of when dealing with the disciplines, but the fact is, these spiritual disciplines better people in other areas of their lives. When one takes the time to spend it with the Lord, it is only natural that her life is

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<sup>29</sup> Appendix F, Respondent G.

<sup>30</sup> Appendix F, Respondent G.

<sup>31</sup> Appendix F, Respondent C.

<sup>32</sup> Appendix F, Respondent J.

<sup>33</sup> Appendix F, Respondent J.

<sup>34</sup> Appendix F, Respondent O.

<sup>35</sup> Appendix F, Respondent N.



going to be more balanced. So, while the focus of this study revolved around church health, when a person gains balance in their spiritual life, balance comes to every other part of his life, too. Foster's *Life With God* is a good resource to address issues of everyday life. Also, the introduction of Stephen Machia's *Crafting a Rule of Life*<sup>36</sup> can be helpful in finding the well-ordered life.

Another person stated that he was "more self-assured in my relationship with Christ."<sup>37</sup> The disciplines bring a person into a closer relationship with God, which therefore, brings him more assurance in that relationship.

#### The Interviews

In September 2014, two years after the project was conducted, four people were interviewed.<sup>38</sup> As stated above, these people were chosen because of their specific knowledge of the church or their long time association. The purpose of these interviews was to assess church health in light of the experience, and it flowed out of the overall spiritual formation emphasis done at Grace Temple from 2008-2013. The questions addressed the last two years at Grace Temple, and the results may generally be attributed to the spiritual formation experience from the Fall of 2012. The interviews were conducted two years after the project implementation for two reasons. First, during the initial write-up of the project results, the surveys did not seem to yield enough information. Second, the interviews provided a look at the long-term results of

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<sup>36</sup> Stephen A. Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life: an Invitation to the Well-Ordered Way* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012).

<sup>37</sup> Appendix F, Respondent I.

<sup>38</sup> The notes from the interviews can be found in Appendices G-I.

spiritual formation in the life of Grace Temple. Conducting interviews two years after the project provided enough elapsed time to know that it was not just another program, but rather that it was something that had a long-term effect on the life of the church.

Interviews were conducted with the current pastor who has been on the staff since July of 2009, and who has been the senior pastor since July of 2013. The Youth Minister at Grace Temple, who has been on staff since March of 2008, was present during and participated in this interview. This shall be referred to in the appendices as interview one. A second interview was conducted with a long-time Hispanic member, and it will be referred to as interview 2. Also, a long-time Anglo member of more than 40 years was interviewed. That interview will be referred to as interview 3.

The interview questions can be found in the appendix titled “Interview Questions.” The first question asked, “How do you describe Grace Temple as more healthy today then 2 years ago?” The Hispanic member, who has been around over 10 years, responded that the church was getting new people into the church, and not just other church members, but new believers. She also saw a greater support for ministries, particularly the AWANA program that emphasizes Scripture memory, and knowing the Scripture for you. During the last year, this particular member became the church administrator. In this role, she noted that God continually provided for the financial needs of the body.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Appendix H.

Regarding the same question, the youth minister and the current pastor stated “We fulfill our mission statement, we are multi-cultural, multi-lingual, leading people to the Lord and helping them grow in their relationship with Christ.”<sup>40</sup> They also commented on the fact that now they are more prayerful about who leads the various ministries of the church. Rather than choosing people simply because they are available, they now spend time praying for the right people to step up and lead. They also noted that the membership is more active than two years ago, noting that the staff does not do everything anymore; rather, it is the full membership who is working.<sup>41</sup>

The church member who has been around for over forty years said, “The church is now molded in such a way to reach out to the community.”<sup>42</sup> In talking with various members of her Sunday school class on a recent Sunday morning, they observed that there was almost no strife in the body at this point. In the same conversation, her husband stated that “If it isn’t for what Ryan did for us we would be out of business.” Though I am flattered that was said, I think it goes back to the premise of this thesis that spiritual formation and getting serious about a relationship with Jesus will bring a church to greater health because I almost led the church to go out of business in the first two years before the major emphasis on spiritual formation.

The second question asked if there were any areas in which Grace Temple was not as healthy as it was two years ago. The two members did not have anything

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<sup>40</sup> Appendix G.

<sup>41</sup> Appendix G.

<sup>42</sup> Appendix I.

definitive to say. However, this question raised a few more points about the health of the church. The older member said this powerful statement: “We had to lose some members to get healthy.”<sup>43</sup> This leads to the point that a couple of important things may happen when a church gets serious about spiritual formation. People are going to get serious about reaching the community; it cannot help but happen because people become a conduit of Christ’s love. Yet, because of this, some in the body who are not conduits of that love may leave because they have no interest in being a church for the community.<sup>44</sup>

The 10-year member answered, “We have new things, while keeping some traditional things traditional, we don’t lose the history of who we are.”<sup>45</sup> The pastor and youth minister said that they are in some ways now putting too much on people. People are now more involved than they were two years ago. The church had a practice that in the three ministry areas in which people were able to serve (Sunday school, corporate worship, and Wednesday night ministries) they always encouraged people to serve in one area and to be fed in the other two. Now, more people are serving in two areas and only being fed in one.

The third question asked, “In what ways do you believe the spiritual formation emphasis affected the overall health of Grace Temple?” The member of ten years said, “Goes back to the fundamentals, being in Gods word, hard to apply something that has

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<sup>43</sup> Appendix I.

<sup>44</sup> Appendix I.

<sup>45</sup> Appendix H.

never been read to your life, seems people recognize importance, no math class without math book.”<sup>46</sup> The member of over 40 years said “Anytime you pray about something, its going to improve, prayer is the absolute answer for everything, when you fill your mind and soul with God’s word, when you are more in tune with him.”<sup>47</sup>

The pastor and youth minister answered “Got the people in the word of God, Bring spiritual formation, getting people in the word.”<sup>48</sup> They also made some comments on this question that go toward helping the experience. First, though an attempt was made to explain fasting, many people, particularly the 7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students, did not fully grasp the concept. Moving forward with these kinds of experiences, the concept of fasting needs to be more fully explained, particularly when it comes to fasting something other than food.<sup>49</sup>

The other area they felt was lacking in the experience was Bible reading. Although the church had been encouraged to read through the Bible in a year during the previous few years, many were not doing so. So, when they jumped into the spiritual formation experience with just a small section of Scripture to read, they read the one verse and nothing else. In any future experiences like this, an optional Scripture reading plan needs to be included in the actual book. In fact, in the author’s work at Baptist General Convention of Texas, a 30-days to mission devotional book has been created

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<sup>46</sup> Appendix H.

<sup>47</sup> Appendix I.

<sup>48</sup> Appendix G.

<sup>49</sup> Appendix G.

and compiled. It contains a plan to read through the Gospels during the thirty days the devotional is being used.<sup>50</sup> They also stated more accountability needed to be built into the system; something needed to happen each day, in addition to the weekly small group. They suggested texting or phone calls.

The fourth question asked, “Do you believe the church to be more open to all people regardless of race or ethnic background? And do you attribute that generally to spiritual formation and specifically to the spiritual formation emphasis in the Fall of 2012?” The general consensus from the staff members, and the 10-year member was that they were not aware of any prejudice that existed at Grace Temple. However, they did say that being immersed in the Scripture and prayer very likely did lead people to being more open.<sup>51</sup>

At this point, I asked a follow-up question to determine if people were more open to the leadership of the church being of an ethnicity other than Anglo. All of them responded that spiritual formation did have an impact in this area.<sup>52</sup> The forty-year member saw a greater correlation between spiritual formation and the openness of people to those of different ethnicities. Of course, this is a person who is more likely to see any underlying prejudice in the body. She stated this “Made people more open, more sensitive to people of different cultures, when you realize this is what God would

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<sup>50</sup> Texas Baptists, *30 Days and 30 Ways: to Missions* (Dallas, TX: Baptist General Convention of Texas, 2014).

<sup>51</sup> Appendices G and H.

<sup>52</sup> Appendices G and H.

have you do?” and, “It changed the people, people became different, it changed their heart, consequently it changed the church, people were more in tune with what God wanted them to be.”<sup>53</sup> As has been stated before, Grace Temple was generally open to people of other ethnic backgrounds; however, in my observation and in the observation of those we interviewed, the door was opened in greater ways when spiritual formation occurred, and the door was pushed open a bit more with this particular emphasis.

### **Conclusion**

The results of the surveys and the interviews lead to the conclusion that spiritual formation leads to church revitalization. Though it is certainly not the only thing that does this, it is foundational for it. This research seems to indicate that to say that it was the only factor would be an overstatement, while to say that it is the main factor would not be. The author has made one statement over and over again as a pastor and now as denominational leader: “When people love Jesus, they do not fight in business meetings. When people love Jesus, they invite their friends to church. When people love Jesus, they give financially to the work of the church. When people love Jesus, their whole lives change.” This is exactly what happened at Grace Temple, and it is exactly what can happen in a church that gets serious about spiritual formation.

As chapter 5 begins and a way forward is explored, one of the things necessary to understand is that this is not a magic formula. However, spiritual formation is

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<sup>53</sup> Appendix I.

something that God uses to change the life of a church. In the next chapter, a way forward will be presented for those whom God is leading down this path.



## CHAPTER 5

### OUTCOMES

This thesis project began with one key assertion: spiritual formation is absolutely necessary if established churches that are in decline are to experience growth once again. Though it is not the only factor, it is a foundational factor. The importance of this cannot be overstated because, without the local church, the cause of Christ is lost in the world. While respect is due those who endeavor to advance the cause of Christ in the world, nothing will advance the cause of Christ like the local church because Jesus established and commissioned it to reach the world for Him. Apart from the family, the church is the primary place where believers are spurred on to do great works in the body of Christ.

Another important aspect of formation is to understand clearly the theology on which it is based. It has been stated in this thesis-project that Scripture is the primary text by which all formation should be done. It is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit speaking through his word which allows people to be formed into the image of Christ. It is also important to understand the special place that Scripture and theology give leaders of churches. So, how the pastor approaches his or her own spiritual formation is very important.

Excellent literature was available to contribute to the overall assertion. The most helpful book to address the subject was, *A Many Colored Kingdom*, which provided a way forward to draw all people into the place of grace. Something that is important to

note is that many declining churches are in decline because the area that surrounds the church facility has changed demographically. Thus, welcoming the “stranger” and the “alien” is vital for the church to survive.

In regard to the results, though it certainly was not the only factor, spiritual formation was a key component of seeing the church move forward to a new future. From the interviews, the survey results, and the numbers of people baptized and attending Grace Temple, the church experienced a revitalization due in large part to spiritual formation.

### **A Way Forward**

Now, let’s explore a way forward for the church, and what further study could be done for churches to begin this kind of work within their own bodies. How should churches and pastors approach these important issues? Keep in mind that a relationship with God should be the priority over any other result that may occur as a result of spiritual formation. A relationship with God is reward enough for the important work of the disciplines.

However, it is important to note that formation will bring about secondary results in a church that also bring glory to God. A church that experiences genuine spiritual formation will see growth in some way. This growth may be in increased attendance, increased giving, or it may be a little harder to quantify in an increased positive spirit in the church.

The following pages discuss a way forward for a church. Drawing on the experience of Grace Temple Baptist Church, these steps are couched in the way of suggestions. It presents what practices were successful, suggestions for what a church can do differently, and some new ideas from further reflection.

### The Pastor's Spiritual Formation

The first step that a church must take in moving towards spiritual formation is that the pastor must begin the formation process. Chapter two discussed the importance of this.<sup>1</sup> Prior to leading the church through a thirty-five period of fasting and prayer, the author engaged in a personal thirty-five fast. This had a great impact not only on the author's life, but on the life of the church.

This particular period occurred in the fall of 2007. The process was simple: during the course of forty days all media was unplugged. This included social media, television, and unnecessary internet use. During this particular 40-day period, the reading of Scripture increased, the frequency of silent times increased, and a quieter lifestyle was practiced. This period formed in the author the desire for spiritual formation.

It is suggested that a pastor who desires to engage this type of discipline should first decide what are the major distractions in his life. Unnecessary time spent on the internet can be a big distraction, and television may be a major time killer. It is suggested that for this time period that the pastor remove those distractions. She may

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<sup>1</sup> See page 43.

ask someone to hold her accountable during this time. This could be another pastor or close friend who has experienced spiritual formation in their own lives. One thought is take a particular book of the Bible, perhaps a New Testament epistle, to use for a *lectio divina* each day. Though this certainly should be done to enrich the pastor's own life, certainly preaching at a later time could flow out of this special time the pastor spends with God in his Word.

It is important for the church to be aware of what is happening during this time. One possibility is to allow the pastor to reduce his normal preaching responsibilities during this period, particularly on Sunday evening or Wednesday evening. All efforts should be made to allow the pastor to spend time alone with the Lord so that he may be refreshed in the Lord and ready to lead the church through the spiritual formation he has now personally experienced.

### Spiritual Formation in the Dying Church

Thom Rainer states that as many as 100,000 churches in America could be dying; these are churches that probably have 10 years of less left to live.<sup>2</sup> As the head of the publishing arm of the Southern Baptists, Dr. Rainer, although he does not have exact figures, certainly has his hand on the pulse of the issue. The author's own observation as Director of Urban Missions for the Baptist General Convention of Texas tells a similar

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<sup>2</sup> Thom Rainer, "Autopsy of a Deceased Church, 11 Things I Learned," *Thom S. Rainer* (blog), April 24, 2013, accessed July 11, 2014, <http://thomrainer.com/2013/04/24/autopsy-of-a-deceased-church-11-things-i-learned/>.

story. Churches all over the United States of America, irrespective of denominational ties or location, are dying.

If the church in America is going to survive for the generations to come, something must be done. Strategic planning will be part of the process necessary to change the direction of the church, looking at new ways to reach people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. However, a major part of the process must be to draw people back to the disciplines of spiritual formation.

It states in 2 Chronicles 7:14 that “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” What must be remembered about this passage is that it is not speaking to modern America. In its original context, it is dealing with Israel, and because the church is God’s people, then that is who it speaks of. So, this passage states that if a church is dying and individual lives are not moving in the direction that they need to be, it is time for humility before the throne of God.

Spiritual disciplines are a major part of the process to get this done. The problem many times in dying churches is that people have forgotten how to pray. In his blog, Rainer goes on to make this statement about one particular dying church, the principle that could apply to many: “The church rarely prayed together. In its last eight years, the only time of corporate prayer was a three-minute period in the Sunday

worship service. Prayers were always limited to members, their friends and families, and their physical needs.”<sup>3</sup>

This begs the question, “How do you get a dying church to begin praying again?” One important step is to begin preaching on the topic of prayer, reminding people of what the priorities of God are for their prayer life. First, of course, it is to deepen their own spiritual walk. Second, it is to draw others into that walk of faith. Jeff Iorg says, “The key to powerful prayer is praying according to God’s will. The simplest and surest way to pray according to God’s will is to pray biblical prayers.”<sup>4</sup>

Most churches have prayer lists that normally outline for church members the sick and those who find themselves in the hospital. Studying and adding to that list biblical prayers for the church could be a way to encourage people to think and pray in the right direction. 1 John 5:14-15 speaks of praying in the will of God. Mathew 9:35-38 speaks of asking God to send more workers into the harvest field. These and other Scriptures can be a rallying place for churches to begin to pray in His will, playing a major role in the revitalization process.

In the case of Grace Temple, this was the first step made to refocus the church away from its own issues out to the community. People with a deep prayer life have a balanced approach to life that allows them look inward and outward, tending to the soul and looking out for the needs of others. The prayer life of a church tells much

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<sup>3</sup>Thom Rainer, “Autopsy of a Deceased Church, 11 Things I Learned,” *Thom S. Rainer* (blog), April 24, 2013, accessed July 11, 2014, <http://thomrainer.com/2013/04/24/autopsy-of-a-deceased-church-11-things-i-learned/>.

<sup>4</sup>Jeff Iorg, *Live Like a Missionary: Giving Your Life for What Matters Most* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope Publishers, 2011), 32.

about it. Both inward-focused and outward-focused prayers are key to bringing a church back from the brink of death.

It is best for the senior pastor of the congregation to write out the prayer requests each week. This allows the person who typically has a full view of the church's mission, and its mission field, to bring to the body prayer requests that will have an impact on the community. It also focuses the pastor's heart in prayer for the community and the church. Each week, he or she is confronted with the extreme needs of the community and congregation, and each week, they are brought in prayer before the throne of grace in the pastor's prayer closet before being broadcasted for prayer to the congregation.

It is also possible that dying churches may have deep-seated sin within the body. It is possible that this sin is not something that happened recently; it may be from the past, yet it has not been dealt with. It is possible that the members who were involved are long gone, or they may still be a part of the body. In either situation, though it may be difficult for the pastor to directly handle the situation, preaching on sin in the body and the opportunity for God's forgiveness must be a major part of the revitalization process.

Another way forward for a church is to turn again to the foundational practice of reading the Scripture together. With the resources available today, it is not difficult to challenge an entire body to read the Bible together during the course of one to two years. In the midst of the 40-day experiences at Grace Temple, people began to read

through the Bible in a year. This kept people in the Word on a regular basis, and it resulted in a deeper spiritual development.

The challenge to read the word regularly in a church that is congregationally governed is essential. If each member is considered equal in the voting rights of the body as they are in Baptist life, then each member must also hear from God. The main place a believer can hear from the Father is in the regular reading of the Word of God. In fact, one comment from the follow-up interviews stated that we did not emphasize this enough in the actual experience and that it should have been part of the book. I am currently working on a similar book for Texas Baptists, and a Scripture reading plan will be in the beginning of the book and will be highlighted in the introduction.

The appendix offers a 5-week experience that may be used in churches to help people begin the process of spiritual formation in their own lives. Spiritual formation is not something that occurs automatically in the life of a person. It takes work, and many times the challenge of the church body helps to get people to the place of beginning formation. The title of the experience describes well what it should be “A Beginning.” It takes into account five of the disciplines that are important for people to begin a deeper walk with God: fasting, spiritual reading, prayer, silence, and simplicity. It also promotes the discipline of reflection.

As has already been stated, pastors should do an exercise like this first. It may also behoove the church to promote shorter challenges to people in regard to fasting as to not shock everyone with a 40-day challenge. Though that was not the way it was done at Grace Temple, in hindsight it may have been a better method. This particular



week also deals with how much time people spend on a regular basis with various “time killers.” This is important because if the church is going to see a turnaround, then the pastors, staff and members of the body must spend time on those things that are most important.

Thus, taking time to do an inventory of the activities of one’s life can be very helpful. This would give the church leadership a general idea of what is happening in the spiritual lives of the members. In most cases, the surveys ought to be anonymous if there is any expectation of an honest assessment.

The second discipline in the study is the deep reading of Scripture. This could have been first because Scripture is the foundation of spiritual formation. Fasting only took the first spot because participants could get right into the fast. Because the Bible is the place where God is most likely to speak to his children, it takes the primary spot in the spiritual formation of the believer. The practice of spiritual reading, as described in the material, brings a person to the point of being able to genuinely apply Scripture to their own lives. This one practice by itself can make a huge difference in the kind of impact a person is having on the world. The impact individual members of a body have on the world is important, and this is what will eventually revive the body back to health. Reading Scripture in the method of *lectio divina* prepares a person for the day. Whether that day is spent in the world or amongst a body of fellow believers, individuals are prepared and ready to do his work.

From this point, we move to prayer and the other disciplines. The foundation of fasting and spiritual reading is set in the first couple of weeks before moving to the

other disciplines. One discipline is not necessarily more important than another, but because fasting and spiritual reading are disciplines people need to do throughout the experience, beginning with those two disciplines is helpful.

A pastor may feel that he or she should not use the Sunday morning worship as part of the emphasis because all of the people who attend Sunday morning worship may not engage in the devotionals or the weekly reflection gathering. Though this is an understandable concern, it is the author's belief that if a church leader can impart to people some aspect or knowledge of spiritual formation practices, then it is better than not imparting any at all.

The Sunday morning service, though formal, can be a great opportunity to teach the disciplines. After evaluation, one suggestion for incorporating this into the Sunday is to place within the bulletin suggestions for living out the discipline during the week. Of course, the issue with this is that devotionals on the topic are already present for those who are committed to the formation experience. However, it provides someone with a little bit less commitment an alternative that could be helpful. People must be journeyed with in the process of spiritual formation, and just because they are not ready to commit to a daily devotional and a weekly reflection group does not mean they are not ready for something.

Providing a bit of explanation about each discipline can help people to grow in their spiritual walk. The entire service ought to be centered on the discipline that is being handled that day. The idea is to point people towards God through teaching that particular discipline. With this in mind, the prayer of the pastor should be that people

leave the service encouraged to engage in the discipline that has been taught for the day.

It is important that in the selection of a devotional not to overload each day with too much material. The goal in creating the devotionals Grace Temple used was to provide people enough room to explore the Scripture and the disciplines in their own thoughts. This is important because the disciplines are personal, and without room to explore them, they could easily be missed in another academic exercise.

### **Differences Between the Plan and the Actual Project**

Simplicity was the key factor that contributed to differences between the initial project plan and the implementation of the project. Initially, the project was structured as a 6-week project. However, after looking at what needed to be covered, it was decided that 5 weeks would be sufficient.

When the project began, the goal was to attempt to teach people all that they needed to know about spiritual formation in six weeks. During the course of studies, it was decided that it would only be possible to introduce spiritual disciplines for spiritual formation in such a short period of time. So, the focus shifted from a comprehensive approach to a basic introduction.

As a result, some changes made included narrowing the discussion of prayer to focusing primarily on the method of prayer from the Lord's prayer and on the persistence of prayer. Prayer journaling was not introduced because it could be a bit

overwhelming at first. However, people were encouraged on various days to write down prayers and, to a lesser extent, to journal some of their reflections.

Additionally, the discussion about silence and solitude was simplified. Though silence was introduced, silence guides were not. For all intents and purposes, it was decided by the author that simplicity should rule the day. Thus a simple 35-day guide was introduced and used by the members of Grace Temple Baptist Church. From the interviews and survey results referenced extensively above and found in the appendices, this approach seemed to help people in their own spiritual formation journeys.

### **Conclusion**

This thesis-project presented the beginning of one way of doing spiritual formation in a church. A suggestion for further study in the area of spiritual formation is the formation of church spiritual direction groups to facilitate opportunities for people to gather with other believers who are seeking after the spirit of God for their own lives. Another possibility for spiritual formation may be to utilize small groups without making it a church-wide emphasis. Could these small groups, without the larger church-wide emphasis, see the same kind of spiritual formation occur? One more option may be to encourage several weeklong fasts scattered throughout the year rather than the extended 40-day fast used in this study. Would this better promote a steady continuous growth? The possibilities are endless when it comes to doing spiritual formation in the life of a church; the key is to begin.

To fully understand what is happening in America right now is a very complex task. Yet, it is one in which churches and church leaders must engage. Yet, the reality is that every generation in the church since the time of Christ has had various issues that had to be grappled with. However, the disciplines of the faith are timeless, even though the way they are done may be different from one context to another. The powerful reality is they can bring about change in a life and in a church that nothing else ever will.

## APPENDIX A

### PREACHING SCHEDULE FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION EMPHASIS

September 30	When God's People Pray (Series Introduction)
October 7	Spiritual Fasting
October 14	Spiritual Reading of the Bible
October 21	Who Are We Praying To?
October 28	Be Still
November 4	Simplicity

## APPENDIX B

### 40 DAYS TO BEGINNING SPIRITUAL FORMATION PARTICIPANT GUIDE

#### **A Beginning....**

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## Introduction to Daily Devotionals

These daily devotionals are meant to be simple and basic. Our goal is not for you to read the verses, and then quickly answer the questions, but rather that you would drink deeply of the Word of God. Each week will have a different theme related to the discipline we are learning about that week. In your small group, you will have the opportunity to discuss what God has taught you through these special times with the Lord. Each day we will have a passage that we encourage you to read over several times. Answer the few questions we have about the passage, and meditate on the verse for the day. Though we understand that everyone has different schedules, we encourage you, if possible, to do this devotional sometime in the morning. This way, you can reflect on it throughout the day. It should not take you long to complete it, but we encourage you to linger with the questions and especially with the passage throughout each day. These devotionals are not meant to serve as your only daily time in the Word. We encourage you to continue in your own daily Bible readings. If you do not have a time each day that you read the Word, we encourage you to take the One Year New Testament guide and go through that as we do this together. Thank you for taking the time to delve into this very powerful time in learning the great disciplines of the faith. Remember this is only the beginning of a lifetime of practicing these wonderful disciplines that so enrich us.



## **Week 1**

### **Fasting**

**Thursday, October 4**

#### **Scripture Reading for Today:**

##### **Matthew 6:33**

This week's devotionals will focus on fasting. We are not just talking about fasting from food, but also from something else that distracts you. Things we fast from are not things that are wrong. The things that are against God and His Word are those things from which we should permanently abstain. Things we fast from are things that we need to put into perspective. The understanding must be reached that these things, as important as they may be, are not the main things in our lives. The main thing in life is the relationship we have with God the Father. Fasting gives us the ability to get that perspective back. We take something such as television, the internet, or fast food, and we give it up for a period of time. We realize along the way how important it really was to us, and then as we get along without it for a while,, we then begin to realize how unimportant it really is in our lives. Richard Foster describes a fast that Catherine Marshall had from being critical of people, and says, "In this selection on fasting from criticalness, notice how vivid she makes the relationship with God. It seems clear that she and the Lord have a lively dialogue going, one that often involves some resistance on her part, a resistance that reminds us of the relationship Abraham and Moses had with the Almighty.<sup>193</sup>" This week, we invite you to fast, to give up something that you do on a daily basis. Perhaps it is watching television, unnecessary, non-work related time on the internet, Facebook, or some other thing that takes up your time. Decide this week to give it up, and to fill the time you would normally spend with it in prayer and Bible reading. We would challenge you to take either what you have given up for the week, or at least part of it, and do it for the entire time we do this Bible study together. You will see that God will bless that time, and the problems of your life will be put in a better perspective.

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<sup>193</sup> Richard Foster and Emilie Griffin, *Spiritual Classics* (New York: Harper One, 2000), 57.

**Friday, October 5**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**Matthew 8:18-22**

Today we take a few minutes to read and meditate on one of the most powerful, and yet shocking passages in all of the scripture. Jesus is raising the bar for those who would follow after Him. In our world, it seems that many churchgoers want to follow Jesus simply for the benefits that it brings such as peace and strong personal relationships. Yet when it comes to following after Christ we have to realize that we really must be willing to give up everything. Currently you are in the very beginning stage of what you have decided to give up for this time period. Think about how hard it is to not have your 'go-to habit' today. For you, this is the beginning of developing that willingness and desire to give up what you have been doing. This is the start. What you will discover in this time period is that Jesus is genuinely better than anything you may be asked to give up.

**Questions for Reflection**

1. How hard has it been for you to give up what you are so used to doing?
2. What lessons do you think you will learn by truly laying down your desires and following after Jesus?
3. What are you doing in place of your 'go-to habit'? How do you think the additional time of scripture reading and prayer will affect you?

**Saturday, October 6**

**An Evaluation**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**Matthew 4:1-4**

Keep in mind that when Jesus was on earth, he still had the power to do whatever he wanted to do. Jesus was not limited beyond what he chose as his limitations. But here we have a temptation that comes upon the Savior. The use of his power to get something for him must have been tempting for Jesus. But Jesus understood that there was something better than the bread that he easily could have made and that his relationship with the Father was more important than the bread that he might have eaten. Have you made the decision that your relationship with God is more important than anything else in your life? Have you decided that you want God more than you want anything else? In this passage, Jesus is not giving up bread forever; what He is doing is putting bread in its proper secondary position to the Father. Remember as you give up something you are not giving it up forever; you are putting it in its proper secondary position to your relationship with the Father.

**Questions for Reflection**

Take a few minutes and reflect on the time you spend each day on the following activities.

1. Leisure reading
2. Leisure internet use
3. Watching TV
4. Reading Your Bible
5. Playing video games
6. Praying

Put the number of minutes you think you spend each day doing these activities next to the activity. Then, put them in order with the activities with the most minutes on top and then going down from there. If we are simply looking at time spent, what is the most important thing for you?

**Sunday, October 7**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**Psalm 51:1-10**

**“A day for forgiveness, renewal, and planning for the days ahead”**

If you are like me, then yesterday may have not been an easy day for you. We took a genuine look at what we spend our time doing and by doing this, you may be realizing perhaps that life for you is way out of balance. I want you today to realize that your life is not doomed to failure, and that it does not have to remain this way. The very fact that you have taken up this study shows that you care and you want to see your life change. As you read the scripture for today, how do you need to respond to what God may be telling you? What have you left out of your life that you need to begin putting back in?

#### **Questions for Reflection**

Today we want to reflect on the goodness that we find in the forgiveness that God offers us. It is the only way we can determine a way forward after all that we have neglected in our lives.

1. What changes have you made in these first few days, that perhaps you should continue after this 6 week period is over?
2. When you ask God to renew a right spirit within you, what does that mean for you? How do you feel God is putting the right spirit within you?

Take time to read Psalm 51 several times. Then take some time to journal through what God is teaching you through this particular passage.

**Monday, October 8**

**Scripture Reading for the Day:**

**Matthew 6:16-18**

**“The Secrecy of Fasting”**

Earlier in this notebook, you read some instructions on how to do a physical fast. Our devotional today is reflecting on the Biblical instructions of fasting which, of course, is more important than any practical instructions ever will be. Jesus’ main instruction on fasting was, don’t brag about it’. Jesus knew that his disciples would fast after He was gone. In fact, he says that in Luke 5:33-35. However, the way he wanted his disciples to fast would always be a private thing. Right now, as a church, we are taking time to fast. You may want to talk about that in your small group and in fact I would encourage you to do so. However, what you do not want to do is brag about your time of fasting. Jesus was very clear that fasting was something that was to be done between you and God. You should not have a spiritual arrogance because of what you are doing.

**Questions for Reflection**

Today take a few minutes to answer this question. How have these few days of fasting been helpful to you in your Christian walk?

**Tuesday, October 9**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**Nehemiah 1**

**“Big decisions and big moments call for a fast”**

Nehemiah was a man who had a great crisis in front of him. He was dealing with big moments and big decisions, and because of that, Nehemiah knew that he needed to fast. In moments of crisis, it is good that you take time to really consider what is happening and prepare yourself for what is happening next. The author's experience is that great clarity comes through fasting, particularly when fasting from something such as television, unnecessary internet, etc. It brings situations you are dealing with into better clarity.

#### **Questions for Reflection**

Today I want you to take some time to journal over a situation you may be dealing with. Do you need to spend some time fasting from TV, or unnecessary internet, or even food, so that you can have better clarity about the situation at hand?

Also consider this as you journal. Now that you are on Day 5 of your fasting, what situations have been brought into clarity for you since you have been fasting?

**Wednesday, October 10**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**Esther 4**

**"Fasting in times of crisis"**

**As you read this, you need to understand the context. There has just been a command given by the King that all Jews will be killed. Esther is of Jewish descent, thus this will affect her and her family.**

Today we discover that at times of great trial and times when crises seems to rule the day, fasting is important. Fasting is an important way that we are able to seek after the Lord, and when we do it accompanied with prayer, God responds to our hearts. In our church at the very end of 2008, things were not looking good in regard to our future. The church entered into a time of fasting and prayer, and since that time the church has steadily climbed in regard to spirit, numbers of people, baptisms, etc. If we continue to read in the book of Esther, we know that God uses Esther to save her people from death. All of this began with fasting.

### **Questions for Reflection**

Today take time to read and answer this question.

What crisis in your life, either present or past, could have been helped by fasting? How would fasting either from food, tv, media, or something else, put things in perspective for you in this situation?

## **Week 2**

### **Spiritual Reading**

**Thursday, October 11**

#### **“Understanding What Spiritual Reading Is”**

Today, we are going to learn a method of combining prayer and Bible study. We need to keep in mind that these two things go together, hand in hand. The word that has been used for centuries for this method is *Lectio Divina*, a Latin word that means “spiritual reading.” Today, I have laid out for you what is called the S.O.A.P method. This was developed by the San Antonio Baptist Association and brings a great deal of simplicity to the process.

Today, take James, chapter 1, and apply this method to it. Journal your thoughts and see what God teaches you through it.

Prayerful Reading can be accomplished by using the S.O.A.P. Method.

SCRIPTURE -- Select a passage of Scripture from your daily reading.

OBSERVE -- Observe in the text a word or phrase that sticks out, glimmers, or that you notice quickly.

APPLY -- Read that word or phrase several times, thinking about its meaning to you. Ask yourself, “How can I use it in my life?” “If I did what it is saying, what would be different in my life?” “What should I change?” “What should I be glad about and rejoice about?”

PRAY -- Pray what you have discovered, learned, observed or applied to your life back to God. Express your gratitude to Him. Be honest because He can handle your emotions and feelings.

You might find it helpful to read, reflect, respond and journal your thoughts each day. It will be easier for you to recall what God said, or what you learned during the week, if you have it written down.



**Friday, October 12**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**Deuteronomy 17:14-20**

Perhaps today, you know that you are a leader and you have led men and women who have been put under your care. Perhaps today you feel that you are not a leader. Either way, may I say to you that in some way you do have influence over people, whether it be your children, your neighbors, or some other person in your life. Therefore in some way, you are a leader.

Today's passage is speaking to a situation that would not develop until hundreds of years after it was written. Yet God knew that eventually the people of Israel would want a king, a person that could in many ways be their hero. This passage tells them that when they get their hero, their leader, their king, he must be a man who is committed to the Word of God. He must be a man who follows after the Word of God.

Today, take a few minutes to first write down those with whom you have influence. You will be surprised who your list may include.

Now take a moment to ask yourself why it is so important to these people for you to stay close to the Word of God. Think about what the Word of God does inside of you and why it is important as you influence these important people with that Word that is alive and active in you.

**Saturday, October 13**

**“Devouring the Word of God”**

Eugene Peterson in his volume, *Eat This Book* brings out the idea of devouring the Word of God. Think of the last time you felt so hungry you could literally have eaten anything. Now take that same feeling and compare it to your feelings for the Word of God. Do you have the same desire for the Word of God as you do for food?

Peterson shows us several places in scripture where instead of using the English phrase, “mediate on the Word”, a better phrase might be to “growl over the Word.” The Hebrew word for “growl” is “hagah” in Isaiah 31:4. Yet, in other places it is used for “mediate.”

Read Psalm 1:2

Read Psalm 34:8

Read Psalm 63:6

As you read those powerful scripture verses, take a few minutes and give voice in your journal to what you want the Word of God to be in you.

**Sunday, October 14**

**“The Word of God keeping us from sin”**

Take some time today to do the S.O.A.P method on the following passage.

Psalm 119:9-16

What does it mean for you and me to meditate on the Word of God?

What does meditation on the Word of God do for us?

Where is the place of sin when we are constantly in the Word of God?

Think for a moment about a jug that is completely full of concrete. The concrete has hardened within the jug. Now, if you were to try and fill this jug with anything else, could you? Of course not. The same is true, when we fill out hearts, our minds, and our souls up with the Word of God, sin has trouble getting a foot hold in our lives. It does not mean that temptation will not still come. What it means, however, is that there will be less room for the temptation when you place the Word of God securely in your mind heart.

**Monday, October 15**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**Psalms 119:105**

**“The Word of God Daily”**

In this 40 day period, one of the challenges is for us to take a day and fast. There are people who do fasting on a regular basis, others who may not do it quite so regularly. Yet regardless if you do it regularly or not, you are very aware of what it is to take an entire day and not eat food. Our bodies need food on a daily basis, and we certainly need water on a daily basis, for without it, we die. The same is true for the Word of God. If we spend weeks without reading and feasting on the Word of God, our spirits begin to die. Our spirit relies on the Word to be able to keep going in a world that is so difficult. Today, we want to be honest about how we are going to read the Word of God on a daily basis. The reality is, without a plan, it is unlikely you are going to get very far. We have attached for you a one-year method of reading through the New Testament using the S.O.A.P method. If you want to tackle the entire Bible, perhaps the one-year Bible will work for you. Before you end this devotional, commit to one of the plans that will help you to begin reading the Word on a daily basis. For it is in that alone that you will have what your soul ultimately longs for.

Think about and answer this question:

How are you going to make the Word of God a priority in your everyday existence?

**Tuesday, October 16**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**2 Timothy 3:15-17**

**“The Word of God changing lives”**

Yesterday we talked about what it means to read the Bible daily. You also perhaps committed to a plan of how you were going to do it. Today we are going to study how the Bible can change not only our lives, but also the lives of people around us.

We know this to be true in the physical realm that if we work out our bodies, eat right, and drink lots of water, our bodies will begin to get stronger. We can also know that in the spiritual realm, if we feast on the Word of God and if we strengthen ourselves through prayer, our spirits will get stronger.

Take time to reflect on what the Word of God means in your life and what it can mean in the lives of others.

**Wednesday, October 17**

**"The Word of God in Days of Doubt"**

**Scripture Reading for Today**

**Job 23:8-12**

There are days it when God seems silent. We ask and yet He does not answer. There is no doubt that Job felt that way in all that happened to him. Take time today to read Job 23:8-12, and think about Job is saying here. God was silent for much of the book of Job. This was all a part of the lesson God was teaching Job and, through Job, the lesson He was teaching us. Yet, we also know that even in the silence, Job would follow God through His Word. The Bible in its current form did not even exist when Job was living, yet even still Job followed after the Word of God. You and I have the Bible and thus when it seems that heaven is silent or when God is simply not speaking, we can pick up the Bible and read and hear what He says to us. We can know that though God may not seem to have a special word for us at this moment, God does have a word for us in His Word. The Bible is the primary place where God communicates to us.

Read Job 23:8-12.

After reading this passage, what does it challenge you to do in the midst of difficult circumstances?

What comfort does it give you in the midst of hard times?

### **Week 3**

#### **Prayer**

**Thursday, October 18**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**Matthew 6:9-15 and Luke 11:11-13**

**These two passages will carry us into the first few days of this week.**

A problem with the term “Our Father” in the very beginning of the Lord’s Prayer is that it brings our minds to our own earthly fathers. Keep in mind this is our problem, not a problem with the scripture. We must understand from that very first phrase of the Lord’s Prayer that it shows us that we have an intimate relationship with God. We are allowed to call upon Him as Father. We understand that there are times in scripture that Jesus will do things that we are not permitted to do because of His special relationship with the Father. This is not one of those times, however; this is a time when Jesus Christ specifically told us to say “Our Father.” Further explanation is given in **Luke 11:11-13**. There we begin to understand just what it means that God is our Father, who cares deeply about us.

Today in our time of devotional, take time to journal on the reality that God is our Heavenly Father. Write about how you feel about your own father, and how that has affected your relationship with God the Father, either negatively or positively. Realize that God the Father is the One who loves you deeply, beyond anything you will ever imagine.

**Friday October 19**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**Psalm 34:1-3 and Matthew 6:9b**

**“Hallowed Be Thy Name”**

First, Jesus helps us understand who God is, our Heavenly Father. Then, Jesus takes us to the place of worship of the Father. When we think of the name of God, His name should be placed above all other names. A large part of our prayer life should be recognizing and acknowledging who God is and what He is capable of doing in our lives. There are two things that this will accomplish in us.

First and foremost, it will accomplish in us “worship”. As the Psalmist says in Psalm 34,

- <sup>1</sup> I will extol the LORD at all times;  
his praise will always be on my lips.
- <sup>2</sup> I will glory in the LORD;  
let the afflicted hear and rejoice.
- <sup>3</sup> Glorify the LORD with me;  
let us exalt his name together.

We worship God, and we hallow and glorify His name. We do this not because of what it can do in us, but because it is simply the right thing to do because God is God. It gives us the understanding, that though God is a close friend, and Father, He is also God all-powerful, and almighty, and this is something we should never forget.

The second thing it does, is when we glorify the name of God in prayer, it helps to understand that there is Someone greater than us. Thus, we are comforted in the reality that when we pray, we do not pray to a weak or timid God, but rather we pray to a God whose name is great and who is greatly to be praised. Today, take some time to praise His name. Take some time to meditate on the fact that God is in His heaven and that we are here on earth. Then, remember that God is and will continue to be awesome, powerful, and yet compassionate towards you every single day. The Father is almighty and powerful, yet compassionate, loving and caring towards you.



**Saturday October 20**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**Matthew 6:10**

**“Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”**

Today, we move to the time of asking God for something. Often when we ask God for something, it is something for ourselves. As we will see in a day or so, there is nothing wrong with asking God for our daily sustenance. However, before Jesus turns our attention to asking for our daily sustenance, he directs our prayers to the will of God being done and the Kingdom of God being expanded. Every day we wake up and there seems to be another story in the news about something sad that has happened. Even as I sit here writing this, I am reminded of two people I have heard of this past week who took their own lives. Stories like these are one of the main reasons God tells us to pray for His Kingdom to come and His will to be done. When God's will is being done and His Kingdom is being expanded, we will then hear less stories like these because people's lives will be in the process of being changed. Our church is located in the midst of a very oppressed community, poverty, crime, immorality, and host of other things that seem to dominate the landscape at times. People will never walk away from prostitution, drug addictions, or immoral lifestyles on their own. They will walk away when God enters their life and His Kingdom takes up residence in them.

Today, look around in your life, the places you live and work, and ask, “do big problems exist?” If you are like me, they probably do. Take those issues and put them in the Hand of God by praying for God's Kingdom to come in those situations. It could be that a person needs salvation, which is the only way a person will ever truly be changed. It might be a situation in your community where Christians need to have influence. Pray that God's Kingdom will come in those situations and for His glory to fill those places because it is the only thing that will ever bring peace to any of them.

**Sunday October 21**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**Proverbs 30:8-10 and Matthew 6:11**

**“Daily Sustenance: Give us this day our daily bread”**

The Bible encourages us to ask for what we need to make it through each day. There is nothing wrong with being financially wealthy; however I am not sure that the Bible ever promises us wealth or encourages us to pray for it. The scripture certainly does encourage us to plan for the future, however. He shows us that we ought to pray that God will take care of today. The reality is that when we pray for our daily sustenance, we are acknowledging that on a daily basis we need God. Even those who have great financial wealth realize that they need God on a daily basis to give them breath and life. They also realize as it often happens that they can lose it all very quickly.

Today take time to acknowledge that you need the Father to give you that daily bread on a daily basis. Without His love and grace, you will never find what you truly need.

**Monday, October 22**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**Matthew 6:12**

**"Forgiveness in Prayer"**

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Today we come to what is perhaps the most challenging part of the Lord's Prayer, especially where we say, "God, forgive us just like we forgive other people." You realize that, yes, you do need forgiveness desperately, yet there seems to be a price for forgiveness which is our forgiveness of others. First, let's understand that God does not put a price on His forgiveness. His forgiveness is a gift that is given for free when we come to Him in faith. Yet, when the Bible encourages us to forgive others as God has forgiven us, it is a challenge to us and it also meets a need.

The challenge is to forgive, to understand that God has forgiven you in powerful ways, and in our acknowledgment of that forgiveness, we realize that we must also forgive others.

Yet even more than this, forgiveness meets a need in us. We need to forgive, because if we do not, we will be drinking the poison of un-forgiveness for years and years to come. An unforgiving spirit in us makes us bitter, angry and generally brings us into a very negative attitude. Forgiveness frees us of all of that. That is why it is so important we forgive.

The reason the Lord's Prayer says, "forgive us as we have forgiven others" is to both remind us to forgive, but more than that, it reminds us that we have been forgiven which gives us the foundation by which we can forgive others.

Take time today to realize how much you have been forgiven, giving you the ability to forgive all of those who have sinned against you. We understand that this will be much more difficult for some than for others but go back to the foundation that God has forgiven you.

Give your voice to this question in your journal:

What is it that you need to be forgiven of, and in turn, where is it that you need to grant forgiveness?

**Tuesday October 23**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**Luke 18:1-8**

**“Keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking:  
The persistence of prayer”**

Think about this passage for a minute. Jesus is not telling us to be unjust judges, nor is he saying that is who God is. Rather, Jesus is reminding us that when we pray, there will be times that prayers are not answered right away. A good example is children. From before the time they are born, we pray that God will bless our children, be merciful to them, guide them, and help them to be all that they are for His Kingdom sake. Yet, it takes years before we know how our children will turn out. It takes years before we will see the results of those prayers. Through the teenage years we may wonder if we are praying pointlessly, yet one day when we see our children turn out for the good, we know that all our prayers were for something. The same is true when we pray for salvation for someone. It may be years before we see them come to faith in Christ. There may be other things that we pray about for a long time and continue to wait for God to answer. The point is to never, ever, ever, give up praying. God tells us to persist in prayer.

Take time today to consider some areas of your life that you need to devote more constant prayer to. It might be your children, someone you know who does not know Christ, or a person with a long-term illness. Decide today that you are going to keep seeking after the Father for that person. Decide that you are never going to give up unless God gives you a definitive no. Take time in your journal to mention those things or people you have prayed for over many years.

**Corporate Example**

In our church, we have had a Corporate Prayer Guide for almost 6 years. There are things on that prayer guide we have continued to pray for, and only now are we starting to see some of them come to fruition. Keep praying and know that God is going to bring about great things through your persistency in prayer.

**Wednesday, October 24**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**Isaiah 40:8**

**“Listening in Prayer”**

When we pray, one of the key aspects is to communicate, but also, more importantly, to listen to what the Lord may be speaking to us about. We have to listen to what God may lay on our hearts in prayer. There are many ways to listen to God in prayer; in fact, we have talked about some of those even this week. But the best way to hear God in prayer is the reading of Holy scripture. Holy scripture is the primary place that God has chosen to reveal Himself to us.

Today is going to be a day of transition for us. We are coming to the close of our week on prayer and beginning and our week of spiritual reading. The reason these two find themselves together is that you really cannot have one without the other. Prayer and the reading of God’s word are in many ways one in the same. Today, we want to take some time to study a few passages of scripture that will help us understand how the Word of God speaks to our hearts and lives.

Take time to read the following passages and in your journaling, give voice to the following question. There are also questions with each verse that should help you with answering the big question.

What is the role of the Bible in your communication with God?

If God’s word is the only thing that is forever, then how much time should we spend with it? And how much should we be paying attention as we read it?

## **Week 4**

### **Silence**

**Thursday October 25**

#### **Scripture Reading for Today:**

**Psalm 46:10**

#### **"Taking a "media" fast"**

Our society has gone from the radio to the black and white tv; from the color flat screen tv to the computer screen; and now information streams to us on devices that we carry with us usually at all times. I was talking to a friend the other day who told me that they can actually stream movies to their bed side every evening on their phone. "My Space" was taken over by "Facebook," and now we have "Twitter" and other means of communication and social networking. You have to wonder, "Does anyone ever get away from it all?" Today, as part of our daily devotional, we are going to read a few passages that encourage our hearts to get away with the Lord. This week, we are going to challenge you to take a complete media fast. You may already be on one as part of your fast for the six-week period but if you are not, we challenge you to do so. For this week, turn off the TV, turn off Facebook, turn off email except what is necessary for work, and turn off the radio in the car. As you "unplug", God will certainly use that in your life to allow your heart to listen and be closer to Him.

Give voice to these questions in your journal:

How does having 24 hour access to media affect you in positive ways?

How does it affect you in negative ways?

**Friday, October 26**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**Exodus 2**

**“The Time of Preparation”**

Give voice to your feelings on how Moses must have felt when he was in the desert land.

We know from other parts of scripture that this particular time in Moses' life lasted 40 years. What do you think it was like in year 2, or 10, or 20, or 30? Do you think he thought he would have to live the rest of his life in that place, never knowing what it would be like to be the leader he always thought he should be?

Give voice to these questions in your journal today.

Do you think the length of time was necessary for Moses to be the great leader He would become? Remember that Moses would go on to lead the 2 million children of Israel. He would become the supreme leader of this group and with that role came incredible responsibility. Do you think his time in the desert being a “nobody” helped him with this?

Where are you in your life? Are you in the “prime season”, doing all that God has called you to do or are you in the season of preparation, still being prepared for what God has for you down the road? Keep in mind that all of us have different callings, none of them greater than others. I think all of us are in either of these places at different times along the way and we are at times in both places at the same time. Do not waste this day or the time of preparation God may have you in. It may be a life of quiet, humble service today, and God may be preparing you for something bigger. This is exactly what He did with Moses. The time of quiet out in that desert, and the days, weeks, months, years and decades of watching those sheep was preparing Moses to be the leader that God was calling him to be. Be thankful for the place God may have you on this day.

**Saturday, October 27**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**1 Kings 19:1-18**

**“Elijah on the Mountain”**

Have you ever been in a place where you were not ready to listen to what God might have to say yet? Elijah had witnessed miracles and had been a part of the great things God had done and right there on the mountain God was about to give him a new mission. The mission was to find the man who would succeed him. Elijah learned on this mountain that though God is capable of speaking in big ways such as the fire from heaven he had recently witnessed, many times God simply speaks in His still small voice. That is the way God works in our lives many times as well. He speaks to us, after we have been through great things, after we have seen the earthquakes and the fires; God speaks to us through the still small voice and in that we are able to hear Him.

Give voice to these questions in your journal today.

Take a few minutes to think through when the last time was that you went to your quiet place, your “Mt. Horeb.” When was the last time you spent time in that place?

As you take a few minutes to read this passage, to spend time in His word, what might God be telling you in His still small voice?



**Sunday, October 28**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**Mark 1:34-35**

**"The Oxygen Line"**

While talking about Jesus' relationship to the Father here on earth, author Philip Yancey compared his time of prayer to an oxygen line. Jesus came to earth, and in doing so, He left all that He knew. He did not give up His deity, but the powers of His deity were left behind. He gave up part of the closeness He had with the Father. Jesus was in a very real sense a "fish out of water" here on this earth. His times with God, those moments that He spent with the Father here on earth, were like getting the much needed oxygen that He needed to survive. If Jesus needed this ongoing relationship with the Father, should you and I not also feel the same way?

We should also make it a priority to pull away to spend time with the Father. For many years in Evangelical circles, we have talked about the "quiet time" a time when we read our Bibles and spend time in prayer with the Lord that ranges from 15-30 minutes a day. It is realistic to say that many people have neglected it because they did not see the need for it. Yet when we think about it we must see it as our oxygen line. It is our life line that we must have to survive in the world we live in.

Take a few minutes to give voice to these questions in your journal.

What challenges do you have in your life? What issues and problems continually come up in your life? How do you think taking time away with the Lord will help you in dealing with these issues? How will this be your oxygen line to help you survive the day-to-day issues you are facing?

**Monday, October 29**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**Matthew 14:13-21**

**“The work to be done”**

When we study the life of Jesus, we realize that he lived a very fast paced life. He took time to slow down, but he also never neglected the work that had to be done. He lived out the calling God had on His life.

This passage begins with Jesus wanting to pull away, for he had heard terrible news about the death of John the Baptist, his cousin and very good friend. He wanted to pull away, to spend with the Father, and perhaps just a few disciples. But there are people in need and Jesus would not neglect them or turn away from the work to be done.

Take time today in your journal to reflect on some of the following questions.

How does taking time away help you with the work that you are called to do?

When are there times that you simply have to engage in the work instead of taking time away? How can you compensate for that time by taking other times away? Think through your weekly schedule, the things you have to do with your children, your work, your volunteer work at the church, and time with your spouse or other family members. Realize that this is work that must be done and take joy in it. Realize that God is going to provide the time for it, but make sure that you do not neglect the time alone with the Father.

**Tuesday, October 30**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**Proverbs 15:22-23**

**“Taking time for Silence:  
Putting it on your calendar”**

The demands in our lives are sometimes very hectic. There are people and projects pulling at us from all different directions. Nothing seems to get done if it is not on the calendar or on our to-do list. There are different ways that you can calendar time for silence with the Lord. I talked to one young lady who told me that for her, time with the Lord was an automatic thing every single morning. It was like eating breakfast; it was simply something she would not do without. For others, the calendar book is very important. You have to make time for it, and when others ask you for that time, you simply have to inform them that the time is not available. You have to figure out what works best for you in regard to your schedule.

Today is a day that we are going to carve out time to make sure that when this 40 day experience comes to an end, we will not forget what God has called us to do.

Take time to write in your journal a daily plan for having time alone with the Lord. Make it a realistic plan, one that you can keep for the next year. Also, realize that if and when you mess up, feeling bad about it is not the answer; rather, getting back up the next day and starting over is.

**Wednesday, October 31**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**Re-read, and perhaps memorize Psalm 46:10**

We have come to the end of our week of media fasting. You may have 15 shows on the DVR ready to be watched tomorrow, but before you do that, we want to take a few minutes today and reflect on what this week has meant to you.

Take time to give voice to the following questions:

1. Has this week changed the desires you have for media? If so, how?
2. Have you felt your spirit being calmed by having things quieter this week?
3. Has this week put a desire in you to media fast again?

## Week 5

### "Simplicity: The Priorities of the Heart"

Thursday, November 1

Scripture Reading for Today:

Genesis 22:1-18

During these days, we have given something up. Perhaps it was TV, internet, or something else that takes up our time. We have worked on placing that habit into a place of secondary importance in our hearts. Today's scripture reading is going to deal with putting something that is not wrong, but could be placed higher than God into the proper place in our hearts. Keep this in mind that God never intended for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac; He simply wanted to be sure that Isaac was not an idol in Abraham's life. Read the following prayer written by A.W. Tozer:

*"Father, I want to know thee, but my cowardly heart fears to give up its today. I cannot part with them without internal bleeding, and I do not try to hide from Thee the terror of the parting. I come trembling but I do come. Please root from my heart all those things which I have cherished so long and which have become a very part of my living self, so that may enter and dwell there without a rival. Thou shalt Thou make the place of Thy feet glorious. Then shall my heart have no need of the sun to shine in it, for thyself will be the light of it, and there shall be no night there. In Jesus' name Amen."*

Journal through this question:

What good things in your life need to be put into perspective so that God can have an unrivaled reign in your heart?

**Friday, November 2**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**Matthew 6:25-34**

We know that our world places a high value on material things. We think that fancy phones, nice houses, cars, and clothes are not a luxury, but a need. Jesus is going to address this issue. Then, there are others of us who have to worry on a daily basis about what will occur in the future when it comes to our bills, health care and other things. Jesus is going to address that as well. He is going to help us understand that though life may not always look like it is going to turn out, when we put Him first, it always does.

I prefer to be in the Lord's kitchen. He has made heaven and earth, and He Himself is the cook and the host. Every day he feeds and nourishes innumerable little birds out of his hand. For He does not have merely a bag of grain, but heaven and earth" - Martin Luther

Give voice to the following areas:

Do you worry about the things of this life and what would happen if you simply stopped worrying and began to put your faith in the One who holds it all in His hands?

What specifically are you worried about? Health, retirement, paying the bills, putting food on the table? Does God have control over those areas? Give examples of how God has provided for you in the past; now, as you reflect on those things, do you believe He will provide for you in the future?

**Saturday, November 3**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**Matthew 6:24**

**“God and Money”**

John D. Rockefeller, America’s first billionaire, was once asked, “How much money is enough?” and he responded, “ Just a little bit more.”

Rockefeller was simply expressing the attitude of so many people across our country. It seems that we never have enough and that if we could simply have a little more, life would be so much better. This is what it looks like to serve our money.

We need money to pay our bills and put food on our table. Yet, the scripture is clear that we are not to serve it, for in doing so we will not be able to serve God also. For some of us who read this, you are simply struggling to get by, and you know that God is the true provider of your needs. Keep that in your heart, and never let go of it. Yet for others of us, there is a constant need to have more money. Should you work hard? Yes. Should you be lazy? No. Yet, you also should not make the main goal of your life to make money, but to glorify the Father. When you place Him first over money, everything else takes care of itself.

Journal through this question:.

What is the main concern of your life? Is it God or is it money? In looking at how you spend your time, what would the real answer be?

Sunday, November 4

Scripture Reading for Today:

Proverbs 30:7-9

**"Happy with Less"**

*This is a verse we looked a few weeks ago, but I think it is worth looking at again. You will find with the disciplines that in many ways they go hand in hand and really build on each other.*

There comes a point in everyone's life, sometimes a fleeting moment that comes and goes when we realize that we simply have too much stuff. Today we have taken time to read Proverbs and to take a few minutes to do an inventory. This exercise will help you understand better what it is that you need and what it is that you may not need. Simplicity does several things for us. It makes our lives easier because we do not have to keep up with as much as we once did. It saves us a great deal of stress when it comes to money, because we no longer feel we have to have it all. It saves us space and makes our lives less crowded. These are some of the benefits of living with less.

Today and tomorrow, journal through these questions. They are not meant to make you feel guilty, but to help you understand exactly what it means to simply have your daily bread and no more.

1. What are things in your life right now that you pay for that really add nothing of subsistence to your daily living?
2. If you were to give a few of these things up, what would you need to do? It may be as simple as selling something or cancelling something. It may be that you need to communicate with a few other people about how you are going to give that up.

These 2 questions may take quite a bit of time for you to deal with, but deal with them because they will have a true and lasting impact on your life.



**Monday, November 5**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**2 Corinthians 9:6-11**

**“Giving Out of Simplicity”**

It really does not matter how much money you have or do not have because life is about perspective. When we realize that God has given us all that we will ever need, and that He has provided and will continue to provide for our needs, we can be at peace. When we are at peace with our financial circumstances, it is from that place that real giving begins to occur. If you are giver, then take time to thank God for bringing you to that place. Ask Him, “am I giving all that He wants me to give?” If not, pray that God will show you how He wants you to give more.

If you are not a giver, ask yourself, has God provided for me? Has God given me everything that I have? If He has done all of this, then how can we withhold the small portion He asks us to give back?

Journal through this question:

If I begin to give, this will occur.....

As you journal through that question, your first thought may be, “I will go broke”, but let’s look at what the scripture says. Read through the passage again before you begin to journal.

**A Note about  
Tuesday and Wednesday**

Over these next two days, we are going to speak from two different perspectives. Some of you reading this are single and perhaps you have only yourself to take care of. Others of you have family to take care of, to worry over, and to fret with. In both situations, we can learn about simplicity and how we can continue down the road of knowing it. The reality is that most of us will at some point or another be in both situations. Thus, we need to understand what it means to be able to serve God fully in both and to grasp the idea of simplicity in both life situations.

**Tuesday, November 6**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**Proverbs 18:22 and Psalm 127:3**

**“The Abundant Life Offered by Christ”**

I used to be nervous about having children or even about getting married. I was worried about the responsibilities that it brought. It unnerved me to think about having to provide for a family. Yet, an old and true friend, who walked the journey before me, told me something that has proven over and over again to be true. A wife and children make life more full. Life is fuller in every way, busier, and with more responsibility, and in lots of ways more joyful.

We think that as parents we are to provide our children with everything, including the latest greatest game or the newest phone or clothes, and if we don't, then we have failed as parents. The reality is more than anything, our families need the abundance that only God can bring. Our need is not more money or stuff, but to fall in love with Jesus and let that be the sustenance for our lives.

Journal through these questions:

If you do not have children at this point, then simply write down how you feel about your nieces, nephews, or other significant children in your life and pray for their parents that they would begin to understand these truths.

What would happen if you decided to raise your children in simplicity, depending only on the abundance of the Lord? What if instead of the plethora of things we gave our children, we gave them the basics and a Bible to read and study?

What if instead of plopping our children down in front of the TV for hours on end, we instead read with them, and taught them the things of the Lord?

What if we required our children to read their Bible before they did anything else in the evening? For that matter, what if we did that ourselves?

**Wednesday, November 7**

**Scripture Reading for Today:**

**1 Corinthians 7:32-35**

**“Simplicity in Singleness”**

Is Paul telling us in this scripture that there is something wrong with being married? No, not all, in fact much of the scripture encourages marriage. What Paul is saying here is that there is something right about single if it is what God has for you. When you are single, you do not have as much to be concerned about, therefore you have more time and energy to put into the work of the Lord. Singleness for some of us is part of living in simplicity.

If you are single, journal through this question:

How has being single allowed you to do more for the Lord?

If you are married, journal through this question:

How can you and your spouse simplify your lives so that you can do more for the Lord?  
If you are single, you may also need to journal through this question.

The following is from Dr. Bill Bright of campus crusade for Christ and teaches us how to physically fast safely if you should choose to do this during this time.. However if there are any health concerns at all you should consult a doctor before beginning any kind of fast. Even if you have none of the health concerns listed you should consult a doctor before beginning any kind of fast that will last more then a few days.

### **How to Fast Safely**

*By Dr. Bill Bright*

As you begin your fast, you may hear from concerned loved ones and friends who urge you to protect your health. And they are right. You should protect your health. But I assure you, if done properly, fasting will not only prove to be a spiritual blessing, but physical blessing as well.

By all means, consult your doctor before you begin your fast. But, be aware that many doctors have not been trained in this area and so their understanding is limited. Even so, it would be wise to ask your doctor for a physical exam to make sure you are in good health. You may have a physical problem that would make fasting unwise or dangerous. Also, if you are under any type of medication, make sure you talk to your doctor before changing your regime. Prudence and caution are in order.

When you are assured that you are in good health, you are ready to begin your fast. Follow the guidelines in the Physical Preparations and Maintaining Nutritional Balance and Health parts of this website.

In spite of the absolute safety and benefits of fasting, there are certain persons who should NEVER fast without professional supervision. For example:

- Persons who are physically too thin or emaciated.
- Persons who are prone to anorexia, bulimia, or other behavioral disorders.
- Those who suffer weakness or anemia.
- Persons who have tumors, bleeding ulcers, cancer, blood diseases, or who have heart disease.
- Those who suffer chronic problems with kidneys, liver, lungs, heart, or other important organs.
- Individuals who take insulin for diabetes, or suffer any other blood sugar problem such as hyperglycemia.
- Women who are pregnant or nursing.

## The New Testament in one Year Spiritual Reading Plan

Provided by San Antonio Baptist Association

- Week 1 Matthew 1-5
- Week 2 Matthew 6-10
- Week 3 Matthew 11-15
- Week 4 Matthew 16-20
- Week 5 Matthew 21-25
- Week 6 Matthew 26-Mark 2
- Week 7 Mark 3-7
- Week 8 Mark 8-12
- Week 9 Mark 13-Luke 1
- Week 10 Luke 2-6
- Week 11 Luke 7-11
- Week 12 Luke 12-16
- Week 13 Luke 17-21
- Week 14 Luke 22-John 2
- Week 15 John 3-7
- Week 16 John 8-12
- Week 17 John 13-17
- Week 18 John 18-Acts 1
- Week 19 Acts 2-6
- Week 20 Acts 7-11
- Week 21 Acts 12-16
- Week 22 Acts 17-21
- Week 23 Acts 22-26
- Week 24 Acts 27-Romans 3
- Week 25 Romans 4-8
- Week 26 Romans 9-13
- Week 27 Romans 14-1 Corinthians 2
- Week 28 1 Corinthians 3-7
- Week 29 1 Corinthians 8-12
- Week 30 1 Corinthians 13-2 Corinthians 1
- Week 31 2 Corinthians 2-6
- Week 32 2 Corinthians 7-11

- Week 33 2 Corinthians 12-Galatians 3
- Week 34 Galatians 4-Ephesians 2
- Week 35 Ephesians 3-Philippians 1
- Week 36 Philippians 2-Colossians 2
  
- Week 37 Colossians 3-1 Thessalonians 3
- Week 38 1 Thess. 4 - 2 Thess. 3
- Week 39 1 Timothy 1-5
- Week 40 1 Timothy 6 -2 Timothy 4
  
- Week 41 Titus 1-3, Philemon 1 & Hebrews 1
- Week 42 Hebrews 2-6
- Week 43 Hebrews 7-11
- Week 44 Hebrews 12-James 3
  
- Week 45 James 4-1 Peter 3
- Week 46 1 Peter 4 - 2 Peter 1-3
- Week 47 1 John 1-5
- Week 48 2 John 1, 3 John 1 Jude 1 & Rev. 1, 2
  
- Week 49 Revelation 3-7
- Week 50 Revelation 8-12
- Week 51 Revelation 13-17
- Week 52 Revelation 18-22

APPENDIX C

40 DAYS TO BEGINNING SPIRITUAL FORMATION BIBLE STUDY DISCUSSION GUIDE

**A Beginning....**

**Bible Study Discussion Guide**

**By: Ryan Jespersen**



## **Bible Study Discussion Guide**

### **Fasting Week 1**

1. In this first week of giving up something that was important to you, how has it affected you? Have you found yourself wanting to return to it?
2. What has helped you keep strong in the face of temptation to not run right back to it?
3. How has the additional time made you a more effective person, spiritually, professionally, and personally? Remember that the disciplines not only affect you spiritually but when done correctly they can have a positive impact on your entire person.
4. When doing the evaluation of your time, where did you feel you needed more balance? How was more balance important in your life?

### **Read Matthew 6:16-18**

5. Why was it important in the world of Jesus to keep fasting secretive? What does it do to a person who decides to brag about their spirituality?

Go over as a group Nehemiah 1 and Esther 4.

If needed, re-read these passages of scripture together as a group

6. Why is it important to fast in and before major moments of life?  
Luke 5:33-35

### **Read Luke 5:33-35**

7. Why is it important for us to continue fasting in the everyday moments of life?

## **Bible Study Discussion Guide**

### **Spiritual Reading Week 2**

Ask everyone to turn in their Bibles to James 1.

1. This week as you used the S.O.A.P method of Bible study, did you notice anything new from James chapter 1 that you perhaps have never seen before?
2. How did this method of studying the Word affect you positively?
3. Did you run into any issues as you used this method?

Leader's Note: Let this be a time of discussion and helping one another. Be careful that the advice given stays positive and on topic.

Re-read as a group Deuteronomy 17:17-20.

4. How does immersing yourself in the Word of God on a daily basis give you the help you need as a leader?
5. How does this immersion affect your relationships in general?
6. Thinking about Day 3's devotional, how do you feel about Eugene Peterson's term, "Eat this book"? How does that phrase compare to the way you are currently reading the Word?

Re-read Psalm 119:9-16

7. What happens to sin when the Word of God comes in? What happens to sin when the Word of God is pouring into your life?
8. Talk with the group about how you plan to make the Word of God a part of your everyday journey. Look around the group and figure out who you could hold accountable in this journey and who can hold you accountable.

Take time to pray as a group, praying specifically for each person in his or her quest to be devourers of God's powerful and amazing Word.

## **Bible Study Discussion Guide**

### **Week 3**

#### **Prayer**

**Take time as a group to read through Matthew 6**

- 1. From your time of devotionals this week, and from taking time to read through the prayer, talk about what God's greatest priorities in the world are.**
- 2. What impact should the priorities of God have on our prayer life?**

**Leader's note:** The Lord's Prayer and the impact it should have on prayer life is much of the motivation behind the Corporate Prayer Guide we pray through as a church each week. Certainly we should pray for those who are sick or going through some other difficulty and we will continue to do so. However, let's also remember to pray for God's Kingdom to be expanded in our community.

- 3. How has your prayer life been affected by the relationship you have with your earthly father?**

**Leader's note:** This could be a very difficult question for some to answer; please take time to allow them to explore this question and give them the freedom not to speak if it is too personal. By just asking the question, this will have a great deal of impact.

- 4. Why does God tell us to ask for our daily sustenance? Why does He not give us a week's or month's supply of daily bread and then ask us to come back at that point and get more? Why daily?**
- 5. Why is forgiveness so important in our prayer life? What happens to us and to our prayers when we refuse to forgive others?**

**Read together as a group Luke 18:1-8**

- 6. Give an example of something you prayed for a long time that eventually came to pass. How did that make you feel about continuing to ask and pray?**
- 7. How does the reading of the Word of God on a daily basis affect your prayer life?**

## **Bible Study Discussion Guide**

### **Week 4**

### **Silence**

**Read together as a group, then take a few minutes to reflect on Psalm 46:10.**

1. When you reflect on this verse, what is it telling you to do? Go deeper than just the surface meaning of the verse. What is it really getting at?
2. As you have taken time this week to fast from unnecessary media, what has that accomplished in you? How has your heart been changed?
3. As you look to the days ahead, what habits will change in your life because of this? Do you think you will watch less television or be on the internet less because you found out how unimportant it really is?

**Leader's Note:** Though everyone in your group may not have done a media fast this week, let them discuss also the ways they think it would change their lives and encourage them to do this kind of exercise in the near future.

**Discuss Exodus 2, re-reading it if necessary.**

How is God using this situation to prepare Moses for what is going to happen next?

Have you ever found yourself in a place where no one seemed to know who you were, where the work you were doing seemed irrelevant, where you felt out of place? How did that experience change your life?

**Discuss 1 Kings 19:1-18**

1. How has the Lord spoken to your heart recently? How does He normally speak to you about particular situations?
2. Why was it so important for Elijah to go to Mt. Horeb to hear the message?  
Could God not have spoken to Him right where He was?

Leader's Note: God can and will speak to us where He wants and how He wants. However, in this case, Elijah needed to go through the journey.

Take time for prayer requests. Pray specifically for the members of the group that they will be able to take the lessons of the week and use them for preparation in the months ahead.

## **Bible Study Discussion Guide**

### **Week 5 Simplicity**

Read Genesis 22:1-18 as a group and discuss the following.

1. How did the passage make you feel about what you were asked to give up? How does what Abraham is being asked to give up here compare to what God has asked you to give up?
2. How has what you have chosen to give up affected you this week, and throughout this entire time?
3. During these past weeks, what have you found that you had more time for since you gave up the habit you decided to give up?
4. How has this been beneficial for you spiritually and for your relationships?

Read Mathew 6:24 and Proverbs 30:7-9 as a group and discuss the following questions.

1. How does having money ruin us? What examples have you seen in your own life and in the lives of others?
2. How does your financial situation affect your outlook on life? Should it have that much effect on you?
3. How would giving up help your daily walk with the Lord and your relationships with others? ( you can fill in the blank perhaps what you have been giving up or something else)

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-11

1. What are some of your issues about giving (or others you have seen)?

Take time for prayer requests. Pray specifically about the discipline of simplicity and making it a part of our lives.

## APPENDIX D

### TABULATED RESULTS: PRE-PROJECT SURVEY

(Distributed and collected Wednesday October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012)

Before survey-28-30 responses on each question, a few did not answer all questions

1. On a regular basis I am likely to fast from something

Very Likely- 4  
Likely- 10  
Maybe - 7  
Unlikely- 8  
Very unlikely-1

2. I take time for silence and spending time alone with the Lord.

Very often- 9  
Often-8  
Sometimes-12  
Not often-1  
Never-0

3. I understand the term spiritual disciplines

With great clarity-14  
With Some clarity-13  
I don't really understand that -3  
What are you talking about?-0

4. When it comes to my possessions I am:

Very loose, knowing that they all belong to the Lord-13  
Somewhat loose knowing they belong to the Lord but also wanting to make sure people know they are also mine. -16  
I am fairly selfish with what is mine. -0  
What's mine is mine, and what's yours is mine -0



5. When it comes to the Bible

I am in the Word daily, and see it as part of my everyday life. -9

I read the Bible daily, but it is a struggle for me. -5

I read the word daily but it is a struggle for me. -12

I read the Bible at least weekly-3

I rarely read the Bible-0

I never read the Bible-0

6. I feel close to God

All of the time-14

Most of the Time -13

Occasionally -1

Never-0

7. I give my time to the Lord and His work

Regularly -16

Sometimes-11

Never-1

8. I give financially to the Lord and His work

Regularly-15

Sometimes-13

Never-0

9. I am likely to spend more time with the Lord in my extra time than on other such as TV, internet, etc.

Very likely -7

Likely -10

Maybe -7

Unlikely =4

Very Unlikely -0

## APPENDIX E

### TABULATED RESULTS: POST-PROJECT SURVEY

(Distributed and collected Wednesday, November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012)

After Survey Tabulation – 16 respondents to the after survey

1. On a regular basis I am likely to fast from something

Very Likely- 4  
Likely- 6  
Maybe - 5  
Unlikely- 0  
Very unlikely-1

2. I take time for silence and spending time alone with the Lord.

Very often-4  
Often-10  
Sometimes-2  
Not often-0  
Never-0

3. I understand the term spiritual disciplines

With great clarity-9  
With Some clarity-5  
I don't really understand that -1  
What are you talking about -1

4. When it comes to my possessions I am:

Very loose, knowing that they all belong to the Lord-6  
Somewhat loose knowing they belong to the Lord but also wanting to make sure  
people know they are also mine. -7  
I am fairly selfish with what is mine. -2  
What's mine is mine, and what's yours is mine -1

5. When it comes to the Bible

I am in the Word daily, and see it as part of my everyday life. -9

I read the Bible daily, but it is a struggle for me. -4

I read the word daily but it is a struggle for me. -2

I read the Bible at least weekly-2

I rarely read the Bible-1

I never read the Bible-0

6. I feel close to God

All of the time-6

Most of the Time-8

Occasionally -1

Never-1

7. I give my time to the Lord and His work

Regularly -10

Sometimes-4

Never-2

8. I give financially to the Lord and His work

Regularly-9

Sometimes-6

Never-1

9. I am likely to spend more time with the Lord in my extra time than on other such as TV, internet, etc.

Very likely -4

Likely -6

Maybe -5

Unlikely -1

Very Unlikely-0

10. As a result of this time, I am more able to do spiritual formation in my life.

More able -12

Less able-1

The same -3

11. As a result of this time, I am more able to lead someone in spiritual formation.

More able -9

Less able -3

The same -4

## APPENDIX F

### POST-PROJECT ESSAY RESULTS

(Distributed and Collected Wednesday November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012)

Question 12-As a result of this time I have been changed in some of the following ways:

Question 13-As a result of this time I plan to do the following in regard to my own spiritual formation in the days ahead:

**Respondent A-** No Answer

**Respondent B-**No Answer

**Respondent C**

Question 12-No answer

Question 13-Be closer to God in everything and everything I do. Brotherly Love more freely. Be more kind and gentle. Full of Holy Spirit in my thinking.

**Respondent D**

Question 12-I have been able to put worldly things in their place compared to the Lord.

Question 13-I plan on trying to read a verse a day and get through all of the Bible.

**Respondent E**

Question 12-My relationship with the Lord has been reassured in the sense that I know I can rely on Him for anything and in any situation. Also I have discovered the importance of being in the Word and the importance of relationships.

Question 13-Stay connected to God in the word more often than usual.

**Respondent F**

Question 12-Though Fasting has given me time to myself even more to the Lord and focus on Him, His wisdom and words. God has given me strength to know the things I can do without. Knowing and letting God be in control has and is a blessing in my life amen.

Question 13-Spiritual growing in my personal relationship with God spending time with Him in prayer and devotional reading. As give to God financially as well as serving the church for God's Kingdom. I love God with others. How awesome are amazing God is.

**Respondent G-**

Question 12-More aware of where my time is has been going.

More aware that those things I fasted from did not add value to my life.

More aware of my daily need for God and His word.

Question 13-Daily time with Him in prayer and study.

Regular fasting from media as a way to gain back control when or if it is slipping away.

**Respondent H-No answer****Respondent I**

Question 12-More self assured in my relationship with Christ

Question 13-Continue

**Respondent J**

Question 12-I am more aware of how much time I spend on other things rather than the Lord.

Question 13-read the word more and pray and learn to be "be still"

**Respondent K-No answer****Respondent L**

Question 12-My priorities have changed. Have more clarity for what was changing me down and taking time from the Lord.

Question 13-Spend less time watching TV, Getting up earlier and on a more consistent basis to study God's word.

**Respondent M**

Question 12-I hope the glass is half full.

Question 13-Seek God first

Note- Respondents N and O are Spanish speakers who wrote their answers in English. This is known because they filled out Spanish Surveys. They were given the option to fill out the survey in Spanish. However, the Hispanics in our church were a loving group who most likely felt the need to fill out the survey in English for my sake. The essay type questions may have also contributed to the fact that we got only two Spanish surveys at the end.

**Respondent N**

Question 12-Pray more, have more time w/kids read my Bible more.

Question 13-Have more time with God to come to church more.

**Respondent O**

Question 12-Be paciente (patient)

Understanding

A good listener

God is first/ everything in my life.

Question 13-Get more involved with God.

Ready the Bible on my daily basis.

Be a better daughter of God.

## APPENDIX G

### STAFF INTERVIEWS

Grace Temple Interview Questions for Current Senior Pastor and Youth Minister  
September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2014

*In what ways would you describe Grace Temple as more healthy than it was two years ago?*

We fulfill our mission statement, we are multi-cultural, multi-lingual, leading people to the Lord, helping them grown in their relationship with Christ.  
Living out the mission statement.

We're letting church members be more active, we are equipping them, discipleship is engrained in everything we do, we let people do the work of the ministry now.  
Together we can accomplish more. Plan the event, pick people, who run that event, pray over those names.  
Give responsibility to the church.

Small and big, we are starting to see this equipping of leaders, we have started a lot of different ministries, equipped, teach us about discipleship, identify of a leader,

When someone comes up to us and says we are meeting people about baptism.

Been good, D groups, deal with sin, and dive into the scripture.

New policy to serve in church, more prayerful, rather than choosing people because they are more available, we plan out the year of course, tons of ways, -need to be actively engaged, more church involvement.

### Discipleship

*In what ways would you describe Grace Temple as less healthy than it was two years ago?*



Putting too much on our people, because of the mission house, delegating more to the people, churches job to do the work of the church, we are actually giving it over to the church.

People are doing so much more then they were 2 years ago, people are serving in 2 areas and being fed in 1, they would like that to be turned around the other way. More in depth discipleship.

More taking what they are learning from getting fed.

*In what ways do you believe the Spiritual Formation Emphasis affected to the overall health of Grace Temple?*

Got the people in the word of God, Bring spiritual formation, getting people in the word. A lot of church did not understand what fasting was.

Younger folks did not get it when it came to fasting, are older folks knew what it was, but our older folks.

*In what ways do you believe the Spiritual Formation Emphasis affected you individually in your spiritual walk?*

We need to reach out to 10 people, texting, accountability is the key. Some people did not-40-50 percent did reading, others probably coasted.

Needs to be accountability in the study.

Put in regular Bible reading

Add to the devotional, Relying on my interpretation,

Did replace regular Bible reading

Teach members scripture interpretation, Jesus is the illuminator of scripture,

*Do you believe the church to be more open to all people regardless of race OR ETHNIC BACKGROUND? And do you ATTRIBUTE that generally to spiritual formation and specifically to the Spiritual Formation emphasis in the Fall of 2012.*

Attribute to the God, how can you love others, if you do not love God first.

This past weekend, we had 4 young people come visit, they walked in, Young ladies look like a guy, they came to Christ, Young man said "I have been to different churches, when I was there, as soon as I walked in, thought people were talking about him, that is the one thing I liked about this church, felt welcome here" He would come back, he felt like people were not judging them.

When people spend time in the word of God, spend time in his presence, conviction that the spirit gives, transformation, they are going to seek to do Gods will. If they do not spend time in prayer, they do not spend time in the word, they will seek out their own agenda.

### **Prayer Guide**

For sure, CPG, started praying, God works out there.

### **Spanish Ministry**

Holy Spirit working, Word of God, doing what scripture says, being obedient to the word, people to the word of God.

The importance of visitation, and small groups, Word to the houses, word of God in a house.

Spanish group to grow.

## APPENDIX H

### INTERVIEW: MIDDLE-AGED ENGLISH-SPEAKING HISPANIC WOMAN

(September 11, 2014)

Ten plus year member interview  
Grace Temple Interview Questions

*In what ways would you describe Grace Temple as more healthy than it was two years ago?*

Growth, different kinds of new people, we are not getting members from other churches, we are getting new believers.

Definitely an emphasis on AWANA, support and encouragement for ministries, scripture memorization, knowing that, basics of the Bible being Gods truth, the apologetics, training up these kinds to not just be, knowing for themselves Gods word.

Always aware of our financial needs, wherever there is a need God always provides. Make up deficits, not publicly telling people, God always provides through the people of the church.

*In what ways would you describe Grace Temple as less healthy than it was two years ago?*

No ways that are not healthy. Constantly growing in the ways we do things, keeping some traditional things traditional, we don't lose the history of who we are.

*In what ways do you believe the Spiritual Formation Emphasis affected to the overall health of Grace Temple?*

Yes, "how could it not be?" Goes back to the fundamentals, being in Gods word, hard to apply something that has never been read to your life, seems people recognize importance, no math class without math book. Encouraged to learn what they are learning.

*In what ways do you believe the Spiritual Formation Emphasis affected you individually in your spiritual walk?*

Some things applied to you, made me more aware of growth. Not personally,

*Do you believe the church to be more open to all people regardless of race OR ETHNIC BACKGROUND? And do you ATTRIBUTE that generally to spiritual formation and specifically to the Spiritual Formation emphasis in the Fall of 2012.*

Our church has been, and always been. I do not recall any resistance from ethnic groups at all. I don't feel the church membership were resistant in anyway, open to the change. Never vocal about it. Never felt unwanted. Especially not now, might have been a little difficult for them, we opened the door a little more with people in their scriptures.

## APPENDIX I

### INTERVIEW: OLDER ANGLO WOMAN

(September 12, 2014)

40 plus year church member interview  
Grace Temple Interview Questions

*In what ways would you describe Grace Temple as more healthy than it was two years ago?*

Attendance is still the same or above, isn't for what Ryan did for us we would be out of business, you molding the church to reach out to the community, atmosphere of the church is really good, the atmosphere of the church, talking about that Sunday, does not seem to be strife, not aware of any major issues.

Thank God for church, and the ministry of it.

*In what ways would you describe Grace Temple as less healthy than it was two years ago?*

NO not at all, kept improving, the old members, had to lose some members to get healthy.

*In what ways do you believe the Spiritual Formation Emphasis affected to the overall health of Grace Temple?*

Anytime you pray about something, its going to improve, prayer is the absolute answer for everything, when you fill your mind and soul with Gods word, when you are more in tune with him.

My prayer life changed when Aleshia was 2, never left my mind.

You just cant do any better.

Did to the whole church, what personally did to you, make the commitment to do that, reading the Bible more, how could that not make them healthier.

*In what ways do you believe the Spiritual Formation Emphasis affected you individually in your spiritual walk?*

Renewed the spiritual walk,

*Do you believe the church to be more open to all people regardless of race OR ETHNIC BACKGROUND? And do you ATTRIBUTE that generally to spiritual formation and specifically to the Spiritual Formation emphasis in the Fall of 2012.*

Made people more open, more sensitive to people of different cultures, when you realize this is what God would have you do?

It changed the people, people became different, it changed their heart, consequently it changed the church, people were more in tune with what God wanted them to be. Doing much better than I thought we were.

## GRACE TEMPLE ANNUAL CHURCH PROFILE 1986-2013

Year Organized: 1947

\$321,400

11/3/04

TEXAS \* BAPTISTS

This service is made possible through continued contributions of E&CT contributors to the Cooperative Process.

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